

ROBERT WALTERS WHITEPAPER

**THINKING LATERALLY TO
IDENTIFY AND SECURE TOP TALENT**

spotlight
SERIES

ROBERT WALTERS

FOREWORD

I am pleased to introduce our latest whitepaper, entitled 'Thinking laterally to identify and secure top talent'. This important topic, while always relevant, is particularly pertinent at the moment as we are still seeing skills shortages across a number of sectors, which continues to make it hard to find top talent. In such a market, it becomes even more important to examine how you recruit professionals and, in particular, think laterally when it comes to both assessing and selecting candidates.

Traditionally, the Australian recruitment market has been very exacting when it comes to screening and selecting candidates for jobs, and it becomes easy for employers to over-analyse and spend copious amounts of time dissecting every little detail. However lately it's become more and more apparent that this level of analysis, coupled with cookie-cutter recruitment techniques, will not be effective in delivering the right person for the job.

Far too often we've seen organisations miss out on candidates who could be top performers in their companies because they were unwilling to stray from their 'tried and true' strict patterns of behaviour and job criteria. That is why I am so pleased we are launching this whitepaper. I genuinely believe you will take a lot out of the findings and recommendations, and hope that you can implement what you learn to great effect.



James Nicholson

Managing Director – Australia, Robert Walters

METHODOLOGY

This whitepaper is based on the findings of research undertaken by Robert Walters in September 2011. To conduct this research, Robert Walters surveyed over 550 job-seekers as well as almost 700 human resources representatives and hiring managers.

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INTRODUCTION

This whitepaper has been created to help employers examine their existing attitudes, beliefs and actions and address any roadblocks that may be stopping them from identifying and securing top talent. Specifically, the whitepaper explores:

- Discrepancies between employer beliefs vs actions when assessing candidates
- Common negative attitudes towards the recruitment process
- Key learnings and recommendations on how employers can increase their chances of identifying and securing top performers.

COMPARISON OF EMPLOYER BELIEFS VS ACTIONS WHEN ASSESSING CANDIDATES

The Robert Walters surveys explored employer hiring preferences and candidate job-seeking experience to establish whether there are discrepancies between what an employer believes is important and their actions when assessing candidates. The surveys focused on four of the main candidate attributes assessed during a recruitment process: qualifications, experience, attitude/soft-skills and potential.

Qualifications

When asked whether they would be prepared to hire a candidate with the right qualifications but no relevant experience, the majority of employers surveyed (52%) responded 'maybe – it depends on other factors', and 38% responded 'no'. Just 10% of employers surveyed said they would definitely be prepared to hire a candidate with the right qualifications but no relevant experience (Chart 1.0).

Similarly, the survey of job-seekers found that the majority of candidates (75%) have not missed out on a role because they didn't have the right qualifications.

These results indicate that employers do not regard qualifications as the most important requirement for an applicant.

Chart 1.0 - Percentage of employers who would hire a candidate with the right qualifications but no relevant experience



■ 10% Yes
■ 52% Maybe - it depends on other factors
■ 38% No

Experience

When asked whether they would be prepared to hire a candidate with great experience but no qualifications, the majority of employers surveyed (49%) responded 'yes', and 41% responded 'maybe – it depends on other factors'. Only 10% of employers surveyed said they wouldn't hire a candidate who had great experience but no qualifications (Chart 2.0).

The survey of job-seekers also supported these findings. The majority of candidates surveyed (42%) said they had 'sometimes' missed out on a role because they didn't have the right job-specific experience, and 18% said they had 'often' or 'very often' missed out. Only 10% of job-seekers surveyed said they had never missed out on a role because they didn't have the right job-specific experience.

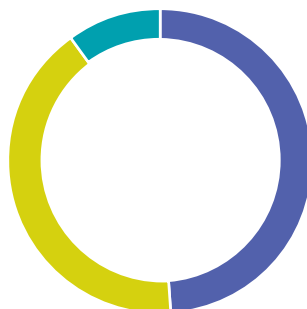
These findings indicate that employers do place a high level of importance on candidate experience.

Attitude/soft-skills

When asked whether they would be prepared to hire a candidate with the right qualifications and experience but not the right attitude, a staggering 99% of employers responded 'no', with the remaining 1% responding 'maybe – it depends on other factors'.

In addition, 63% of employers said attitude/soft-skills are the most important attribute of a candidate, and 35% said they were important but not a deal breaker. When asked which attribute would give a candidate the edge over their competitor where there were only two candidates remaining, 73% of employers selected 'attitude/soft-skills' and 18% selected 'job-specific experience' (Chart 3.0).

Chart 2.0 - Percentage of employers who would hire a candidate with great experience but no qualifications



■ 49% Yes
■ 41% Maybe - it depends on other factors
■ 10% No

However, the vast majority of job-seekers surveyed indicated that they think employers do not place enough importance on attitude/soft-skills during the recruitment process, with 71% of respondents saying employers should place greater importance on a candidate's soft-skills and 90% of respondents saying employers should place greater importance on a candidate's attitude.

These results indicate that there is a discrepancy between what employers consider important in theory, and what they actually focus on during the recruitment process. This finding is explored more in the *Key learnings and recommendations* section.

Chart 3.0 - Percentage of employers who indicated a particular attribute would give a candidate an edge over their competitor

Attitude/soft-skills	73%
Job-specific experience	18%
Industry-specific experience	9%
Qualifications	0%



Potential for growth

When asked whether they would be prepared to hire a candidate with great potential but not exactly the right experience, the majority of employers surveyed (62%) responded 'yes', and 34% responded 'maybe – it depends on other factors'. Only 4% of employers surveyed said they would not be prepared to hire someone with great potential but not the right experience (Chart 4.0).

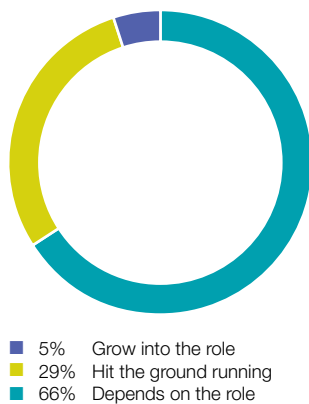
Chart 4.0 - Percentage of employers who would hire a candidate with great potential but not the right experience



Similarly, 66% of employers said they would be prepared to hire a candidate with great potential but not the right experience and then train the new hire to get them to the right skill level, and 30% said 'maybe – it depends on other factors'. Just 4% of employers surveyed said they wouldn't be willing to hire a candidate with great potential and train the candidate up to the right skill level.

In addition, 70% of employers said they would be prepared to hire a candidate who was at a slightly lower level to what they wanted if they believed that candidate had great potential, with 27% responding 'maybe – it depends on other factors'.

Chart 5.0 - Percentage of employers who would prefer to hire a candidate who can hit the ground running or grow into the role



However, when asked if they preferred to hire a candidate who could hit the ground running or grow into the role, only 5% of employers surveyed said they would prefer to hire a candidate who could grow into the role. The majority of respondents (66%) said 'it depends on the position', and 29% said they preferred to hire a candidate who could hit the ground running (Chart 5.0).

This inconsistency is highlighted by findings from the survey of job-seekers. When asked how often they had started a new job and grown out of it within six months, just 11% of respondents said this had never happened to them. The majority of respondents (49%) said this had happened to them 'often' or 'very often'. Similarly, when asked how often they had started a new job and then realised they didn't have any room to grow in that organisation, 44% of job-seekers responded that this had happened to them 'often' or 'very often'.

In addition, when asked whether they would prefer to start a new job where they could hit the ground running or grow into the role, 33% of candidates said they would prefer to start a new job where they had room to grow, and 43% said it depended on the role/organisation. The minority of respondents (24%) said they would prefer to hit the ground running.

These results indicate that while employers do believe in hiring for potential in theory, they do not do so in practice. This finding is explored more in the *Key learnings and recommendations* section.



49%

49% of professionals have often started a new job and grown out of it in six months

COMMON NEGATIVE ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE RECRUITMENT PROCESS

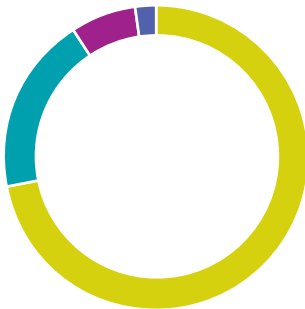
The surveys also aimed to identify existing employer attitudes towards key elements of the recruitment process, including their flexibility on job criteria, levels of trust in recruitment partners, approaches to the screening process and methods for assessing a candidate's attitude/soft-skills.

Flexibility on job criteria

When asked how closely a candidate needs to match their requirements to be made a job offer, 72% of employers said the candidate must meet 80% - 100% of their requirements, and 19% of employers said the candidate must meet 60% - 80% of their requirements; 2% of employers said the candidate must meet 100% of their requirements. Just 7% of employers said they were flexible if the candidate had the right attitude (Chart 6.0).

Unsurprisingly, when asked how often they have to compromise on their requirements to fill a vacancy, only 4% of employers responded 'never'. The majority of respondents (46%) responded 'sometimes' and 18% responded 'often' or 'very often'.

Chart 6.0 - How closely a candidate must meet an employer's requirements to be offered a job



- 2% 100% of requirements
- 72% Between 80% - 100% of requirements
- 19% Between 60% - 80% of requirements
- 7% Flexible if they have the right attitude

Chart 7.0 - How important employers consider the initial candidate screening process



- 29% Most important
- 59% Fairly important, but not most important
- 12% Just something that needs to be done

Trust in recruitment partners

When asked if they trust their recruiter's opinion on a candidate's potential, the majority of employers (58%) said they only trusted their recruiter's opinion 'some of the time'. Just 37% of employers said they trusted their recruiter's opinion 'most of the time'.

Similarly, when asked if they were willing to compromise on their specifications for a role if their recruiter suggested it, only 12% of employers responded 'yes, most of the time'; the majority of employers would only compromise 'some of the time' (76%).

Screening process

When asked how important the initial screening process is to the overall success of a new hire, the majority of employers (59%) rated the process as 'fairly important, but not the most important thing'; only 29% believe it is the most important stage of the recruitment process (Chart 7.0).

The majority of employers surveyed (83%) believe that the best way to initially screen candidates is to review all CVs submitted then create a shortlist. Just 5% of employers think that reviewing all CVs and also calling everyone who applies is the best approach, and 2% think calling everyone who applies and then looking at CVs to cull the list of candidates is the best way.

When asked what technique employers actually use, 72% said they initially screen candidates by reviewing all CVs submitted then create a shortlist. Only 2% of employers surveyed review all CVs and also call everyone who applies, and less than 1% of employers call everyone who applies and then look at CVs to cull the list of candidates.

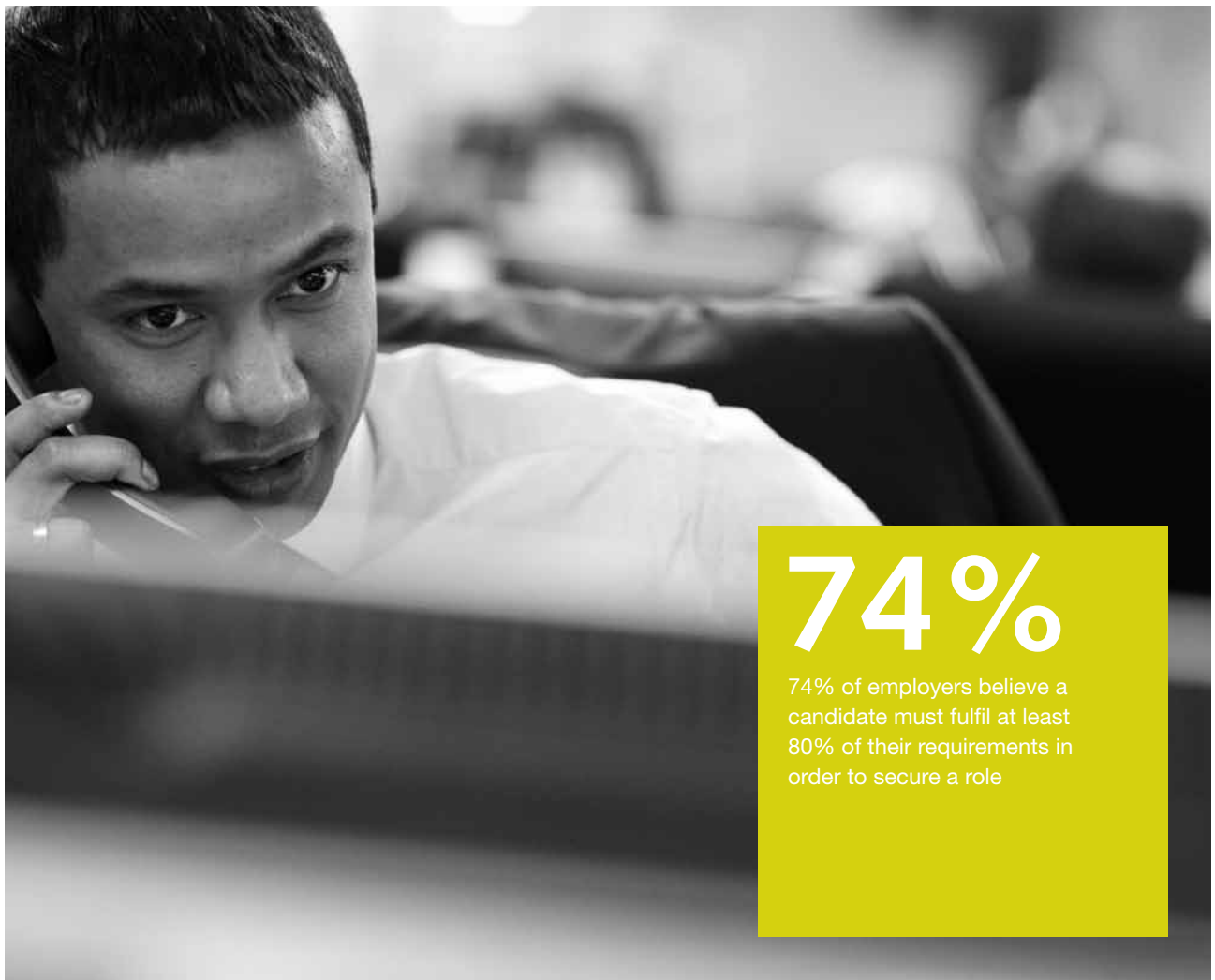
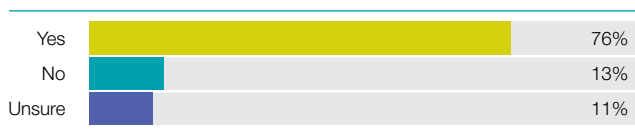
Methods for assessing a candidate's attitude/soft-skills

The majority of employers surveyed (86%) ask questions in job interviews to establish the attitudes and potential of candidates for every role. Only 12% of employers use psychometric testing to establish the attitudes and potential of candidates for every role; the majority of employers surveyed (42%) said they never use psychometric testing to establish the attitudes and potential of candidates.

In addition, only 61% of employers say they brief their recruiter on the attitudes/soft-skills they want in a new hire for every single role.

Interestingly, 76% of job-seekers surveyed said they think employers should spend more time getting to know them personally during the recruitment process (Chart 8.0). The majority of job-seekers (47%) also indicated that they have never attended a social meeting with potential co-workers as part of an interview process, and 31% of job-seekers said they had rarely attended a social meeting.

Chart 8.0 - Percentage of job-seekers who think employers should spend more time getting to know them



74%

74% of employers believe a candidate must fulfil at least 80% of their requirements in order to secure a role

KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the surveys of employers and job-seekers indicate that there are four key learnings that should be taken into consideration by employers looking to improve their chances of finding and securing top talent.

Key learning #1

There are discrepancies between what an employer says/believes they want in a candidate and the decisions they make when selecting candidates.

Recommendation: be prepared to ‘walk the talk’

To increase their chances of finding and securing top performers, employers need to be honest about what they are looking for in a candidate when recruiting for a particular role, and make sure that they are truly assessing and measuring candidates based on the attributes they have identified as being most important. This is particularly vital when employers have identified that attitude and potential are the most important attributes, as indicated by the results of the survey conducted.

At the beginning of a recruitment process many employers often believe that they want a professional who will be the best fit for the business and that they are happy for skills to be trained, but when it comes to reviewing a shortlist of candidates to interview, still try to select those with CVs that exactly match their skills requirements and overlook the candidates who may not be exact matches but who also have great personal skills. As a result, these employers often select the candidate who is strongest on paper but not in reality.

Often those candidates with skill sets that exactly match an employer’s requirements will interview well, but will not necessarily turn out to be the best employees. Therefore if employers truly value competencies and behaviours over skill sets, they need to be able to identify and properly value them during the screening and selection process.

To increase their chances of finding and securing top talent, employers need to be honest about what they are looking for in a candidate when recruiting for a particular role.

Key learning #2

Employers can be too inflexible on job criteria and as a result find they have to compromise on their requirements.

Recommendation: be flexible with your requirements and willing to train

Expectations of employers are becoming more specific in terms of skills and experience requirements, which can result in employers finding it difficult to source candidates who exactly match all the criteria for a particular role.

While having a clearly defined job description is obviously important, it is also vital for employers to be flexible on what skills are mandatory and what can be developed once the candidate is in the role. Employers should instead aim to identify candidates who have the potential to develop into the role and learn any skill sets that may be missing from their CVs. And the more senior the role, the more flexible employers should be; once a professional has reached a certain level their basic technical skills should be a given, so employers should instead focus more on attributes such as interpersonal skills, attitude and culture fit.

Similarly, if a candidate doesn’t have prior experience in the relevant industry, employers should consider whether this could be a positive as the candidate could bring fresh ideas and processes to their company. In addition, employers should be open-minded when considering other requirements such as flexible working hours.



76%

76% of professionals think employers should spend more time getting to know them in the recruitment process

Being flexible on job requirements and willing to recruit based on potential will ensure that employers increase their chances of securing top performers for their organisation. In addition, it will assist with retention rates, as new hires will be much more engaged in a role they are learning and growing in than one that they outgrow quickly.

It is also important to remember that the time and cost of replacing someone who turns out to not be the right person for the job will usually outweigh the time and cost of training a strong candidate with great personal attributes.

Key learning #3

Employers who partner with recruitment consultancies don't always place enough trust in the expertise of their consultants.

Recommendation: have faith in the recruitment consultancy you have partnered with

To increase their chances of finding and securing top performers, employers need to feel 100% confident in their recruitment partner and be willing to trust the recommendations provided to them. It is therefore vital that employers have a close and trusting relationship with the recruitment consultancies they have selected.

When working with recruitment consultancies, employers should aim to establish a true business partnership with their providers, rather than just viewing the consultancy as a supplier. By viewing the recruiter-employer relationship as a business partnership and working closely with their providers, employers will enable their consultants to offer quality tailored recruitment solutions that are based on a truly consultative process and a deep understanding of their business and culture. This in turn will help employers feel more confident in their recruitment partner and willing to trust the recommendations provided to them by their consultants.

A close working relationship will also give employers more opportunities to appreciate the skill and knowledge of their consultants. Professional recruitment consultants have a thorough understanding of the markets in which they operate and have enough exposure to a range of candidates to be able to spot potential talent for specific roles. Therefore employers who work closely with their consultants will increase their chances of securing professionals who will develop into top performers for their companies.

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Key learning #4

Employers can be too focused on the short-term when recruiting for a role, and forget to consider opportunities for career progression for the professional they are recruiting.

Recommendation: recruit for the career, not the job at hand

For top performers to thrive in and remain loyal to an organisation, they need to have room to develop within the role they are being recruited for. Employers therefore need to ensure that they have considered, and can provide, potential career paths for the professional they are recruiting.

Additional industry-specific research undertaken by Robert Walters throughout 2011 confirms the importance of recruiting for the career, not just the job at hand, with 'opportunities for career progression' frequently cited by professionals as the key thing they are looking for when changing roles, and also a key contributor to job satisfaction. Therefore employers who ensure that the professional they hire has room to grow will not only increase their chances of securing top talent for their organisation, they will also improve their retention rates.



86%

86% of employers ask questions in job interviews to establish the attitudes and potential of candidates for every role

CONCLUSION

As more companies continue to face difficulties identifying and securing top talent who can thrive in their organisations, it is important that employers examine their attitudes, beliefs and actions during a recruitment process. This can help employers identify any roadblocks that may be stopping them from considering the widest possible pool of candidates.

ABOUT THE ROBERT WALTERS SPOTLIGHT SERIES

This whitepaper is the third in the Robert Walters Spotlight Series. The Spotlight Series features a range of thought-leading whitepapers designed to help employers identify and address topical issues that could be affecting their recruitment processes.



CONTACT US

To discuss this whitepaper or your recruitment needs in more detail, please contact your Robert Walters recruitment consultant or **James Nicholson, Robert Walters Managing Director – Australia**, on **+61 (0) 2 8289 3130** or **james.nicholson@robertwalters.com.au**.

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