

Understanding Graduate Candidates in 2009



The past month has been a tumultuous one to say the least.

If bushfires, floods and the continuing Global Financial Crisis have provided us anything it is the chance to **step back, reflect** and **gain perspective** on what is **most important in life**.

We took the opportunity during February while working with hundreds of graduates and candidates across a variety of industries and backgrounds, to understand what was on their minds given recent events.

Graduate candidates are, right now, adding meaning to the relationship between their career aspirations, the impact of the GFC and the impact of the recent natural disasters and are rediscovering what is most important to them.

As you prepare for careers fairs around the country, the question of whether these candidates will be applying to your company as a prospective graduate employer will depend upon whether you meet their needs.

As we spoke with graduates and candidates during February, the concept of large scale loss of human life impacted nearly every candidate and graduate we spoke to, with dozens knowing someone directly affected or worse still, lost.

As a result, they spoke about wanting to **make a difference**.

With the GFC in the news every single day, the candidates and graduates were highly concerned with this impact on their careers. We spoke to candidates who had recently had a parent made redundant – a concept that is both unfamiliar and terrifying to these young people who have never before witnessed a recession.

As a result, they spoke about **job security**, and of getting the best **training and development** possible.

It appears that the results of the AAGE Candidate Survey 2009 still hold strong, despite having been conducted before the GFC made world headlines and the well-recognised acronym that it is today.

This survey was conducted with 2,582 new or future employees from 127 organisations between April to September 2008. Two-thirds of these candidates were due to complete their degree in July 2008 or later.

The results uncovered that the top 10 very important factors when deciding who to apply for, as ranked by importance by the candidates themselves, were:

- 1) Training and development
- 2) Long term career prospects
- 3) Overall reputation
- 4) Content of work
- 5) Security of employment
- 6) Work-life-balance
- 7) Reputation for ethical behaviour
- 8) Mentoring
- 9) Opportunity for further study
- 10) Reputation for corporate social responsibility

Despite all the turmoil of the GFC, and the sickening loss of life and home in the bushfires and floods, the results of the AAGE Candidate Survey remain valid.

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The priorities of candidates at careers fairs next month will remain more or less the same with some minor reshuffle in rankings.

We expect that:

- **Security of employment** will be more important than ever before. It was already ranked in the top 5 in the AAGE survey at 62 per cent. A recent SEEK survey of more than 10,000 Australian employees found that 67 per cent are concerned about their current job or career in light of the GFC. As a result, it is most likely that candidates will apply to more companies than in the past, in order to actually land a job.
- The relative importance of **reputation for corporate social responsibility** will increase, given the impact of the natural disasters on their broader community, and the desire that individuals have for giving back. There have been several public displays of generous donations and calls to action from companies that have impressed the already socially minded candidates.
- Overall, candidate's desire for **training and development** will continue to be paramount. Ranked 1st in the AAGE survey, it will remain extremely high, and candidates will want to know how you can train and develop them to prepare them for change and uncertainty. You also need to be able to reassure them that working with you will give them an edge in a tightening job market longer term.

If you are serious about positioning your company as a graduate employer of choice in 2009, it is crucial the staff representing your company at careers fairs in March are aware of these needs. It is far too easy for poorly-briefed staff to slip in to talking mostly about practical things they know well, for instance how great your rotational program is (rotational programs were ranked a very low 13th in importance to candidates!).

Ensure you brief your staff on the top 10 very important factors, emphasising that **security of employment**, **reputation for corporate social responsibility**, and **training and development** will all be top of mind given the GFC and recent natural disasters.

Next month we will be looking at the **Top 10 skills and behaviours graduates need to embrace change**, build resilience, rise up and become the most talented graduate intake your business has ever seen.

Diamonds are formed under pressure and there are enormous diamonds in your graduate intake waiting to form.

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