

Aussie - Kiwi Rivalry

The traditional rivalry between the Anzacs knows no limits. At least that what phone calls from Australia have recently implied.

I've had a number of enquiries from Australian farmers asking me to source staff for dairy or sheep and beef operations by advertising their positions in New Zealand. I occasionally have the same request from South Islanders looking for North Island immigrants because their local labour supply appears not to offer the skill base or numbers required to fill the roles.

The theory seems to be that New Zealand's farming industry and expertise will offer a greater choice of staff and mean better results. My gut feeling has been cautious about this and so far I've been proven right!

In the Australian cases I've only been prepared to recruit in New Zealand if we have first checked out their local labour market. That's because I believe the chances of success are much higher if people are familiar with the local environment and don't bring the risks of relocation to new farming systems and social settings. To my mind the challenge is not so much a lack of people but more a need to promote each job professionally and attract the best from a limited market.

This has got me thinking about how to promote employment opportunities in times of skill shortage or more particularly when the local workforce doesn't seem to have what you're looking for.

People and promotion

The recent Australian assignments have brought fascinating results.

My priority has been to construct advertisements that communicated the opportunity, prestige, career challenge and lifestyle benefits of each role. I convinced my clients this required investment of time and resources into defining the role and converting this to relatively high profile advertising.

The results have been very positive and dispelled some of the assumptions about the availability of quality people.

Some employers seem quite pessimistic about who might be out there. They fail to realise how many motivated and skilled people are looking for better opportunities because they are being under valued in their current roles.

This is not about paying higher salaries. It's about offering better opportunity and quality employment relationships. The fact that both positions were filled at salaries less than the clients expected to pay is proof of this. What attracted the people was the professionalism of the employers, and the culture of the business – something I work hard to communicate in our ads.

A further success factor was possibly the intrigue created by an advertisement for a position in an Australian owned and operated business that invited applicants to apply to a New Zealand Consultant. It's taught me that curiosity can be a great motivator to maximise enquiries.

Tips for success

Advertising for staff is all about promoting opportunity. Advertising will not work on its own but the style of advertisement does confirm an employer is serious about being the best they can be. Small time advertisements imply small time opportunities. Positive, professional advertisements communicate potential for career growth to attract the best.

Advertisements should convey the culture of the business and the reward, job satisfaction and challenge that will result. They should focus less on what the employer is looking for and more on what will excite and attract top applicants.

When the labour market is under-supplied, it is important to keep advertisements broad so enquiries are attracted from a range of backgrounds. Avoid making the specifications too narrow only to find an ideal applicant didn't call because of some minor detail. It's better for the employer to be make that judgement than have restrictive criteria that eliminate those who could be developed for success.

Buy local

I am convinced applicants with local knowledge and networks – especially regarding farming systems, climate and business/community connections - are much lower risk than those who need to shift interstate or across the Tasman. Both nations should be proud of their farming achievements and avoid getting too jealous of the other to assume the skills available overseas are superior to what's available at home. Those from further afield may look attractive but the flip side is the major risk of importing the unproven.

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