



LEADERSHIP LAB

How to attract leaders to your organization – and keep them there

AARON GILLESPIE

SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

PUBLISHED 7 HOURS AGO

1 COMMENTS SHARE TEXT SIZE BOOKMARK



Recruiting and retaining leaders who are the right fit takes thoughtful planning and focus.

NATTAKORN MANEERAT/ISTOCKPHOTO / GETTY IMAGES

By August, 2021, the Canadian job market had almost fully returned to pre-pandemic levels, recovering 92 per cent of job losses.

This rejuvenated labour market is rich with competition, and skilled candidates are in high demand. This has left, according to a recent KPMG [survey](#), almost 70 per cent of small and mid-sized businesses struggling to find and retain staff who have the skills they need to grow the company.

In such a climate, it becomes vital to attract qualified candidates that will stay committed to delivering long-term success. It's no secret that transparent and strong values, culture, training and incentives matter. But recruiting and retaining leaders who are the right fit also takes thoughtful planning and focus.

We opened the first COBS Bread location in Canada in 2003 and, in hindsight, we didn't have the right process in place for attracting franchisees who could help us grow the business the way we envisioned. We soon realized that, for the calibre of brand we aimed to build, simply looking for candidates with managerial experience wasn't enough.

Today, we have a robust recruitment and training process, and our franchisee success rate is high – in fact, 2021 has been a record-breaking year for signed commitments from new franchisees. I attribute much of this success to a five-factor recruitment process to evaluate candidates: a growth mindset, passion, a strong desire to work with people and connect with the community and recognizing the value of a franchise system.

LEADERS BEGET LEADERS

At COBS Bread, we've learned many lessons over the past 18 years, and they have helped shape our key tips for recruiting skilled leaders:

1. Focus on a candidate's overall profile. It's easy to get hung up on specific experiences and lose sight of someone's overall traits. In a time when people are shifting careers more than ever, strong candidates don't need to tick every box. Tasks specific to an industry can always be learned. And, in the case of franchises, it's not about candidates with deep pockets but more about how they fit corporate culture and values.

For example, one long-standing franchisee brilliantly exemplified these factors despite not possessing the adequate financials. After being turned down initially, the candidate built a case study that demonstrated why she would make an ideal franchisee. We learned that passion and motivation for success far outweighed any upfront deposit and loaned her part of the funding to build her bakery. The result: Her bakery is now thriving, proving that it's worthwhile to absorb some financial risk to bring the right people aboard.

2. Build a strong recruitment process. Extensive franchisee candidate interviews, including executive one-on-ones, can seem onerous but are key to ensuring the right fit – and to reducing the future need to unwind a floundering relationship. At COBS Bread, we grade every franchisee applicant first against the five factors above. A short personality test reveals their unique learning and leadership style. Over time this feeds a predictive index, where new candidates can be grouped by traits – creating a data pool that reveals the makeup of the best possible applicants. New franchisee recruits also commit to an in-bakery discovery day to ensure a mutual fit and so they can demonstrate the success factors in action. In turn, this gives them an opportunity to see if they can see themselves operating a bakery for a long time.

3. Play the long game. Any company's goal is to attract, grow and keep leaders. For those with expansion plans, the initial tendency is to open further outlets by bringing in new leaders to the company. (At COBS Bread, for instance, 75 per cent of bakeries are opened by new franchisees.) Still, an underappreciated path to long-term sustainability is to grow and nurture leaders from within. At COBS Bread, we focus on developing our bakeries' attraction and retention strategy, helping them hire the right people who are poised to become future leaders, helping us grow within the network and create multi-site owners.

4. It takes a village. A key point of growth is offering ongoing opportunities to learn. One successful method is understanding what each person's optimal training environment is and pairing them with existing franchisees/leaders for both mentorship and skills training. Really lean into this and, rather than it being a spot of window dressing, build out a fulsome program (at COBS Bread, it's four months long).

Bringing in the right people to your team will be the reason for your success or failure. Focusing on responsible growth and investing in thoughtful, solid strategies to attract and retain your leaders is always a winning approach.



HANDOUT

Aaron Gillespie is the president of Vancouver-based COBS Bread, with almost 140 bakeries across Canada. He is the Leadership Lab columnist for October, 2021.

This column is part of Globe Careers' Leadership Lab series, where executives and experts share their views and advice about the world of work. Find all Leadership Lab stories at [tgam.ca/leadershiplab](https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/careers/leadership/article-...) and guidelines for how to contribute to the column [here](#).

Stay ahead in your career. We have a weekly Careers newsletter to give you guidance and tips on career management, leadership, business education and more. [Sign up today](#) or follow us [@Globe_Careers](#).

More From The Globe and Mail

OPINION

How to differentiate helpful from unhelpful negative criticism 

MERGE GUPTA-SUNDERJI

Montreal video game developer Ludia tries to recharge creativity with new office space



OPINION

Bobbie Racette is bringing Indigenous values to an entrepreneurial startup

KARL MOORE AND WÁHIAKATSTE DIOME-DEER



These organizations are helping young women see themselves in engineering careers



My employer wants to control when I clock in for my shift. Is that legal? 



Why it's a challenge for mid-sized firms to find the right lender



© Copyright 2021 The Globe and Mail Inc. All rights reserved.

351 King Street East, Suite 1600, Toronto, ON Canada, M5A 0N1

Phillip Crawley, Publisher