

The Changing Candidate Experience

by ASJ Partners

Change. What better word is there to describe the past eighteen-plus months, rife with adjustments and modifications and alterations to our work, home life, spending habits, vocabulary, social connections, and perspectives on almost everything. It seems it would be easier to note things that haven't changed. That list would be considerably shorter.

One facet that did not escape unchanged is that of the candidate experience. Or rather, the expectations of the candidate experience. There's nothing like a shutdown of all but essential businesses coupled with an intense upheaval to daily life to create a dynamic shift in the expectations of job candidates. And now, as the economy recovers, the hiring world faces the challenge of massive job openings with too few skilled laborers to fill the positions. So naturally, this leaves employers and recruiters scrambling to determine just how much and in what ways the candidate's expectations have changed.

The one certainty is this: we must elevate the candidate experience. But to do that, we must first understand the gravity of the factors influencing the post-pandemic job candidate.

An Uptick In Anxiety

COVID-19 heaved a massive pot shot at our collective mental health. Anxiety soared as people hunkered down, uncertain of what the future held, fearful of the disease and its impact on everything from the food supply and finances to their children's education.

As early as June of 2020, a [CDC report](#) noted in a survey of adults that 31% of respondents reported symptoms of anxiety or depression, 13% said they had started or increased substance use, 26% reported stress-related symptoms, and 11% reported having thoughts of suicide in the past 30 days. *"These numbers are nearly double the rates we would have expected before the pandemic,"* stated Joshua Gordon, Director of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH).

This collective increase in anxiety may result in job candidates who appear nervous or fidgety. They may ask more and different questions than during pre-pandemic interviews. Remember that job searches produce their own set of nerves. Coupled with this pandemic-induced uptick in anxiety, HR departments and hiring managers should step up efforts to make interviews and the entire hiring process as non-stressful as possible. A warm, welcoming smile and fist or elbow bump (the new handshake) will get the interview off to a good start. As will a sincere offer of appreciation for the candidate's time and interest in the position. Considering the current ratio of workers to open positions, employers would do well to roll out the reddest carpet possible.

An Increased Desire and Affinity For Technology

You are utilizing the ease afforded by technology to make the application process a snap, right? Keep in mind that "online process" doesn't automatically mean user-friendly and fast. Some applications remain as cumbersome as a five-page paper app. Even folks who

didn't consider themselves internet savvy saw an improvement in their online skills during the pandemic. And now they, too, expect to find easily accessible, quick-to-complete online job applications. Don't risk losing a valuable employee because they skipped past your job opening due to the lack of a simple online application process.

Let's Talk Compensation

One surprising yet understandable after-effect of the pandemic is how it changed folk's perspective on work-life balance and compensation. More time with the family shifted priorities for many breadwinners. Those once standard 50-hour work weeks and those long, tiring commutes have fallen out of favor big time. This new mindset has forced employers to elevate the candidate experience by upping the ante with sign-on bonuses, more flexible schedules, cash incentives, perkier benefits, and most certainly higher wages. Offers of college tuition reimbursement and other educational/training opportunities are also popping up to entice candidates away from other employment options.

The bottom line: candidates know what they want, and the sooner employers get on this same new page, the more successful businesses will be at filling open positions on their roster.

Summary

Adapting the candidate experience you offer to fit the experience your candidates want has proven to be essential in 2021—kick-off 2022 by following the advice of [Jeff Bezos](#).

"We see our [candidates] as invited guests to a party, and we are the hosts. So, it's our job every day to make every important aspect of the [candidate] experience a little bit better."

(Bezos quoted with the word *customer* replaced by *candidate*)

The best way to elevate the overall candidate experience? Shift to a perspective that views the job candidate as a customer. We pull out all the stops to make the customer's experience the best it can be, right? Because focusing on the customer creates trust and loyalty and nurtures a long-term relationship. That same attention to the candidate experience will net quality, engaged employees to add to the team.