

# Simplify the Recruiting Challenge

Hiring the ideal branch manager doesn't require rocket science

By Kevin Allen

A successful branch manager in the mortgage-origination business needs the suave, out-going and persuasive personality of a salesperson and the poise, self-motivation and integrity of a business manager. Rarely does someone successfully pull off both skill sets. When they do, that person is usually successful at inspiring team members to work hard to exceed expectations and achieve significant goals.

The art of hiring a successful branch manager that is an ideal fit for a mortgage company can be a challenging task. Yet, with careful thought and intentional discussions, finding that exceptional branch manager is a very achievable objective.

## The initial steps

Before mortgage companies even begin the search for new branch managers to augment their loan origination efforts, they must identify what they are looking for. Understanding the business strategy, management style and overall motivation being sought in potential candidates is imperative. Mortgage companies should map out these characteristics in detail before they start reaching out to candidates.

Once the desired traits being sought are clearly identified, the search process can begin. There are a variety of search methods available. Some mortgage lenders find that seeking input from existing employees who have connections is the most effective way to find promising branch-manager candidates. Employees are not likely to recommend someone unless they are confident about that person's abilities — especially when the

recommended person will be in a prominent leadership role.

Working with recruiters is another approach, but it can be a little "iffy" in terms of results. If a mortgage lender is working with a recruiter who doesn't know the company and industry well, it probably will not turn out well. On the other hand, a recruiter who has a deep understanding of the company's goals is more likely to get desirable results. Inviting recruiters into the corporate office, for example, is a great way to help them understand the mortgage company's culture. In turn, this will help them to select preferable branch-manager candidates.

Industry conferences and training seminars can provide the perfect opportunity to meet top originators from around the nation. These events offer representatives of a mortgage lender a chance to speak with leading producers in person, which is a great way to get insight into their business strategies and personalities — and offers an edge in getting the recruiting effort off to a good start.

Social media platforms also can be effective in identifying potential branch-manager candidates, but this approach comes with a caveat: Social media should be used in a strategic and smart way to seek out ideal candidates. Sending out mass messages via social media platforms to attract branch-manager prospects may net a lot of inquiries, but normally not very desirable candidates.

Pinpointing specific candidates and then reaching out to them through social media is a more strategic approach that often works well. Of course, it is important in cases where prospects are identified via social media channels to follow up with multiple phone

discussions and an in-person meeting before making the final decision.

## The courting phase

After the initial contacts with prospective branch managers are made, it's time to start discussions with candidates. Mortgage companies need to keep the following in mind when interviewing these candidates:

### ■ Listen, listen and then listen some more.

During conversations, allow the candidate to speak as much as possible. By listening, the interviewer can determine what the candidate is searching for in a new employer. Listen as candidates speak about their careers, history and future goals. Are they driven? Do they talk optimistically about the years ahead?

### ■ Identify a candidate's current challenges.

Pinpoint the issues and problems that prospects are experiencing at their current employers. Can those challenges be remedied once they are hired? That question must be answered honestly.

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■ **Ask follow-up questions.** Dig deep. Separate coaching and management questions from production questions. Both are crucial yet different aspects of a branch manager's job. Ask the candidates situational questions to gain an awareness of how they would handle tricky circumstances. Most importantly, learn what they really want from their career.

■ **Give the process the time it deserves.** Rome wasn't built in a day. A perfect team can't be built in a day either. Make sure you have multiple discussions over time to really get to know the branch-manager candidates. As the relationship moves along, invite the best prospect to spend a day at the corporate office to interact with other managers and the operations team. It is amazing how much an on-site visit can impact a prospective branch manager. Paying attention to how a candidate reacts when experiencing the mortgage company's culture firsthand should help with making the final hiring decision.

Time is extremely valuable in the mortgage industry, but it is vital to slow down your hiring process. It can be a very costly and critical decision to bring a new branch manager onboard — so ensure that the appropriate time is taken to get to know the prospect and related team members.

## Decision time

Before making the final decision on a branch-manager hire, ensure that discussions with that person have provided a thorough understanding of the candidate's goals, personality and how that individual will fit

into the company's culture. It also is vitally important to be honest and transparent with candidates.

If false promises were made during the hiring process, a new branch manager will figure it out quickly after coming onboard. If you truly value and respect the person's time, you won't allow this to happen. So, be open about the company's struggles and the areas where improvement is needed. This will impress the best branch-manager candidates. Of course, you also will want to share with the prospects what the company is currently doing to remedy those issues.

Remember, deciding whether or not to move to a new company can be a life-altering decision for a branch-manager prospect. Not only is the individual concerned about the "downtime" in production during the transition, but the prospect also worries about switching his or her whole team to a new environment and potentially new systems. Branch-manager candidates will want to be completely sure that any transition to a new mortgage company will benefit their team members as well.



Overall, when hiring a branch manager, if the process is not rushed, and a premium is put on clear communications, the process tends to go much smoother. In fact, when the right person is found, it can be quite a rewarding experience for all as they thrive in the new environment. At that point, everyone will realize that the effort put into the hiring process was well worth it. ■