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ATB Financial Takes a Page out of Online Dating to Recruit Top Talent

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Abstract

Many aspects of the traditional recruitment process are broken. Rather than complain about the state of recruiting, ATB Financial is experimenting with creative and social aspects of their recruiting process. This article describes what ATB Financial is doing in this area, and how they are using lessons learned from online dating and applying those to their recruitment processes.

We have all been there – you spend hours, even days crafting the perfect, error free cover letter and apply to your dream role and then nothing, crickets. Days go by, then weeks and your excitement wears. On the flip side, hiring leaders post a job and pray the right candidate will see it and be motivated enough to throw their name in the hat. As you sift through resumes you realize that many candidates did not read your posting, another handful are nowhere near qualified, and most do not even bother with a

cover letter. Frustration is felt on both sides of the equation. There has to be a better way to match the right talent with the right role and that is exactly how ATB Financial's Digital Business Banking team felt.

ATB Financial is an Alberta-based financial services institution, with more than 5,000 employees working at more than 300 locations across Alberta.¹ ATB's culture is our lifeblood – it is what makes us one of the top places to work in Canada. We need to protect our culture by hiring the right DNA and that is why we take this so seriously. But we are also in a situation where our people pipeline needs to be very active as we hire a lot, especially within our Digital Business Banking team. This team has become the feeder team for many other parts of the organization. Top talent on this team quickly moves into new parts of the business. We truly need to look at hiring as a proactive 365-day job - not just a reactive priority when there is an empty seat.

We believe a great recruitment process is rooted in transparency, meaningful connections and reciprocity. All three values form the foundation of the ATB Digital Business Banking team's talent strategy. We are disrupting recruitment norms to humanize and reimagine a broken process, making it work for both candidates and hiring leaders alike. We have removed job postings and introduced a LinkedIn talent community as the primary channel through which we engage and connect with potential talent.² Drawing inspiration from the world of online dating where initial connections are built online and developed through offline "dates", we have designed a unique recruitment process that is best described through the four characteristics we describe further below: (1) Let's go for a test drive, (2) Character over credentials, (3) It takes a village, and (4) Jump in!

Let's go for a "Test Drive"

Most traditional recruitment processes are seemingly built on a platform of power. The company has the job that everyone wants, and makes candidates run through a gauntlet of (often pointless) exercises to potentially join their company. We thought, what if we could create a more level-playing field where both job creators and job seekers had equal power in test-driving the relationship? Through the aforementioned LinkedIn Talent Community, members not only access insider content on the culture, people, work and leadership style within the Digital Business Banking Team but they can also create and post content that exhibits their interests and enables our team to get to know them better. If both ATB and prospects are interested in "going on a first date", our team can connect with job seekers by inviting them to one of our in-person hangouts, where members of the ATB team connect with these job seekers.³ Additionally, prospects may be invited to an ATB BoostRStage live pitch event to further see what ATB is about.⁴

Character over Credentials

What if we did away with resumes and cover-letters and instead connected with people and got to know them for who they are versus what their resume says about them? Our approach to getting to know interested candidates involves them creating a 5-minute video and asking them to get as creative as possible in illustrating to us who they are on a holistic level. We want to know what makes you tick,

your interests/hobbies and how your unique journey of life experiences has led you to now potentially be a part of our ATB family. Essentially, just like with dating, both parties want the other to “open up” and “let down their guard” so we want candidates to get real with us because we are ready to get real and vulnerable with them. So far, we have seen some impressive videos that have made us laugh and cry. Many of these videos left us feeling inspired by candidates’ creativity in expressing who they are.

It Takes a Village

All members of the Digital Business Banking team, from the Level 1 Advisors, to our Marketing and Business Coordinators, to our Managing Director, are involved in helping decide who gets shortlisted. Each team member is empowered to share their input on who they feel would be the best fit for our ATB family. For an incoming team member who made the cut, there is nothing more flattering and reassuring than knowing that you were voted in by the *whole* team. Every one of your peers now has a vested interest in your success. It feels good when we have gotten to that “exclusive” level in our dating relationship. You know that you have been chosen as the special one among all the others. You can go ahead and close your online dating account at this point.

Jump In!

Impressive shortlisted candidates are then given the opportunity to come shadow the team and experience what a “Day In The Life” of that specific position would look like. This further extends the “Two-way test driving” concept that is at the heart of our new hiring approach. They get to feel out the role, the team, the culture and decide if this is the right place for them and the team gets to see how candidates would perform under real circumstances. We might compare this stage of the process to introducing the person you are now dating to your parents or close friends – it is when things start to get real.

Conclusion

The ATB Digital Business Banking team’s approach to hiring is very much like a courtship where both parties are getting to know one another but there are no expectations of long term commitment or marriage (i.e. a job offer) unless both see it as a fit. The end result for both leaders and candidates is meaningful connections and a refreshing take on the recruiting process. For the leaders, it leaves them with an abundance of talent at their fingertips without ever having to look at another resume. And for candidates, they get to show-up as themselves and really get a taste of what they are signing up for, while having fun doing it.

About the Authors

Neetu Sidhu has a diverse background in startups, digital platforms, marketing and social entrepreneurship. She is passionate about design, innovation and making a positive impact. As Director

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of Digital at ATB Financial, Neetu is excited for the potential to provide world class, deeply humanized experiences to entrepreneurs through purely digital channels. Neetu can be contacted via [LinkedIn](#) or [Twitter](#).

Shahzia Noorally is on a personal mission to change the HR industry, challenging the norm around how people and culture strategies should be executed in organizations. She has been an active influencer in the HR communities in Calgary and Vancouver for over 6 years working currently to build unique recruitment branding and culture strategies for the Transformation team at ATB Financial in Calgary. She is a published writer, speaker and blogger and holds both a Bachelor of Management degree from the University of Lethbridge as well as a Masters of Education degree from the University of British Columbia. Shahzia can be contacted via [LinkedIn](#) or [Twitter](#).

Endnotes

¹ See <https://www.atb.com/about/Pages/default.aspx> for additional information about ATB Financial

² See <https://www.linkedin.com/groups/8535445>

³ See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqY9bF1HlbM&t=29s> for a short video overview of these hangouts

⁴ See <https://atbboostr.ca/> for additional details of the ATB Boostr program