

occupop

# The Celebrity Factor

Ultimate Guide to Delivering a  
**Red-Carpet  
Candidate  
Experience**



# Introduction

## Who's your favourite celebrity?

The one that would have you tripping over your words or your feet? The one that you'd do anything for? Got a mental picture of that person?

Now, what if they applied for a job at your company? Hey – it could happen. Somewhere in a parallel universe.

Is your first thought - “Yay! I can't wait to show them how much I admire them and want them to work here!”?

Or – “Uh oh. I can't subject them to our standard hiring process! What can we do to show them how special they are?”

How would you treat them? What would you do differently than you're doing now? How could you modify the hiring process to entice a Celebrity? How could you give them a **Red-Carpet Candidate Experience**?

Our goal with this guide is to offer practical advice, ideas and guidance to help you stand out in a competitive market with an unforgettable, high touch candidate experience.

Ready? Lights, camera, action!



# The Ultimate Guide to delivering A Red- Carpet Candidate Experience

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A practical and proactive guide  
for anyone who wants to give an  
unforgettable 5-star candidate  
experience

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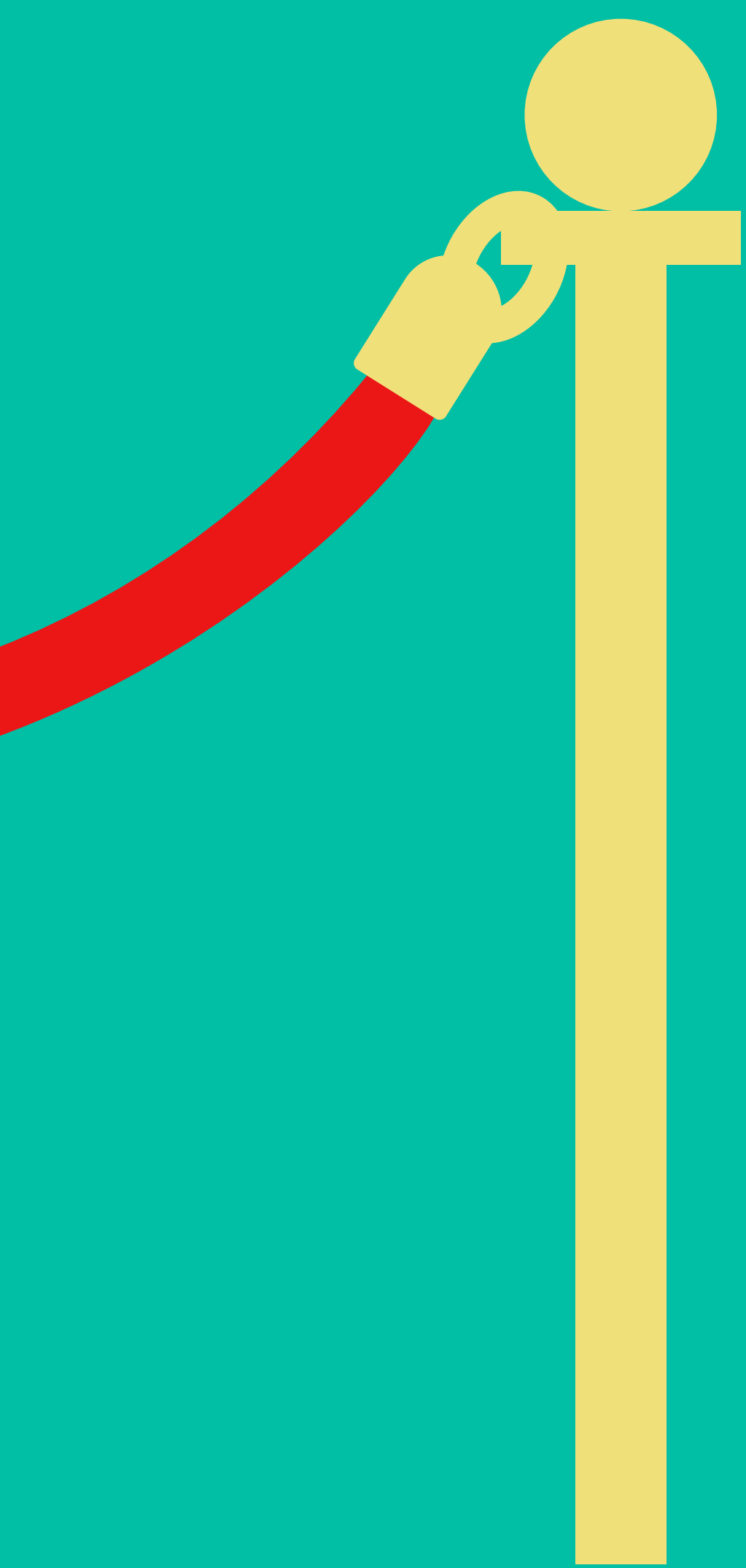
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# What's wrong with the standard hiring process?

Let's call that celebrity candidate who applied to your company **Taylor Swift** for this purpose. If your answer about your current hiring process was “Uh oh”, it may be time for some creative change.

Ask yourself: What's wrong with your current process if you don't want Taylor Swift to go through it?

Is your future Taylor more important than your current candidates? Does Taylor deserve better than your employees?

What would you get out of hiring an actual Taylor Swift? Recognition, publicity, maybe some deals? But what about employee engagement & retention, reduced turnover, enhanced skills, business, opportunities, etc.?

So, if you won't get anything of much value, why would you treat Taylor Swift better than your best potential money-makers?

During periods of high unemployment levels, businesses may have their pick of candidates and can dictate the terms of employment. Candidates are anxious to get hired so they're less likely to bargain.

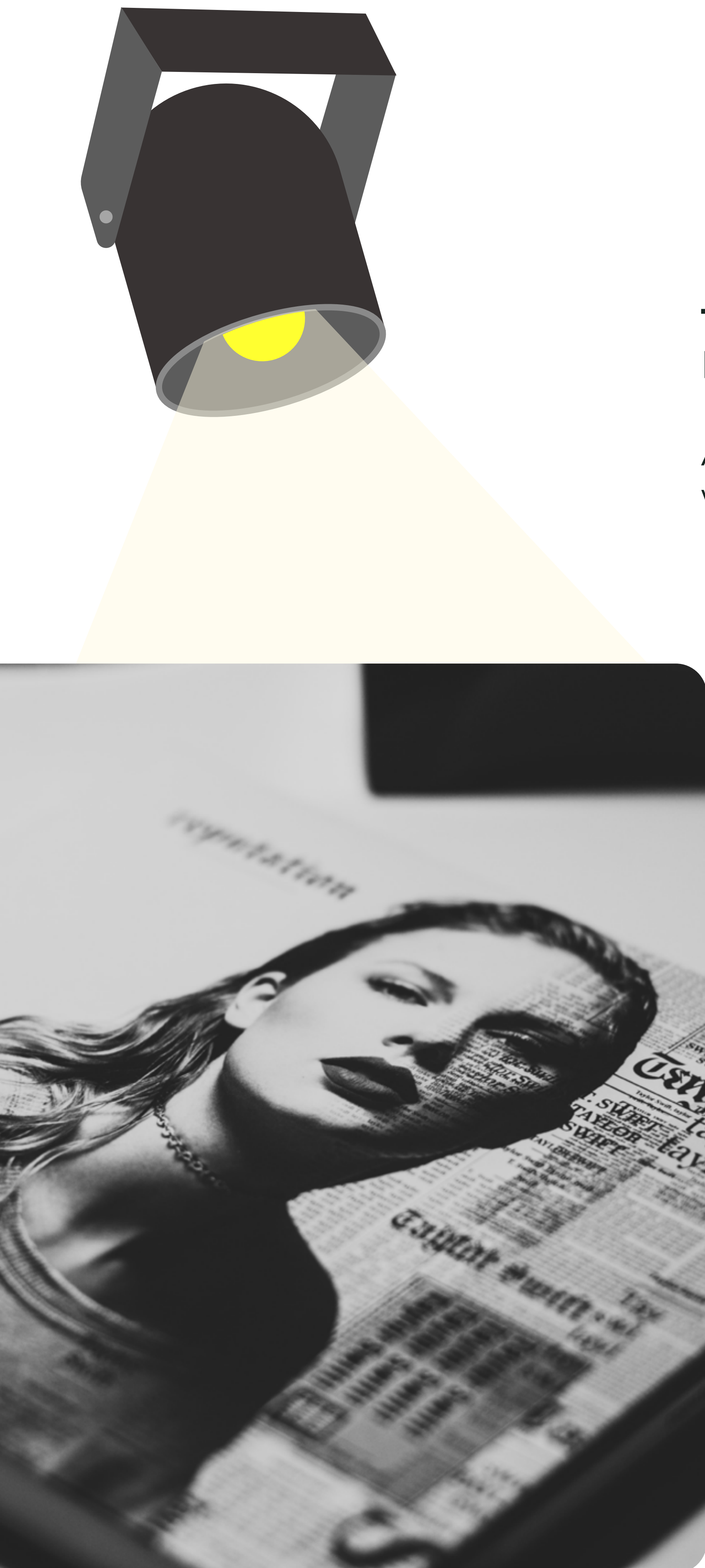
But they may also be more likely to leave when opportunities open up.

The pandemic changed everything we know about hiring. Some companies have more vacancies than they can fill. Some are laying employees off or eliminating jobs. Restaurant employees were laid off in droves, but Amazon workers were in high demand.

Once workers got a taste of working from home, many decided they didn't want to give that up. They may leave companies that don't plan on continuing remote work.

But managers are concerned about managing employees they can only see on a little screen.

The bottom line is that the standard hiring process won't work in the world we're living in now.





# Attempts at improving the hiring process

The names have changed. In the early days in the U.S., and still in some companies and countries, Personnel was the name of the department that managed all the people-related responsibilities.

The function took on a more strategic approach, so the name changed to Human Resources. And HR still frequently has responsibility for recruiting.

But the staffing function has become more specialised and is frequently an integrated, but separate role. And, like HR, it has experienced name changes in an attempt to stay more current and relevant.

Staffing, hiring, recruiting, talent acquisition. All good improvements to more clearly reflect the true value those functions bring to an organisation.

But what has really changed besides the name? The processes, and more importantly, the value that the company places on those functions haven't changed enough.





## The pandemic factor

It seems that every article about leadership these days emphasises the strong focus on soft skills in today's business environment. Experts are talking about a “seismic shift” in how people are treated.

The standard hiring method was all about what the company wanted and needed. It was like a beauty competition. Candidates had to compete to stand out from the crowd and convince the recruiter that they were the best candidate.

One industry expert characterised recruiters as “chauffeurs”. The hiring manager puts in an order for the perfect candidate and the recruiter “delivers” the product.

That's an interesting concept. One that we can certainly identify with. It may be reality but is it good practice? Unfortunately, that's roughly how many hiring practices work all around the globe.

But should we really treat a candidate like a commodity? Aren't they individuals? That we want to come and work for us? And trust them with our business success?

Maybe we should really think about the way we view candidates.

## The demographic factor

As if the pandemic wasn't enough, we're also experiencing changing global demographics. As a result of improved health care, some countries are experiencing an ageing population. Others have larger numbers of young people who are already in the workforce or poised to enter it within the next 10+ years.

A **study** by Eurostat shows that there is a “greying” of Europe. It cites lower birth rates and extended life expectancies for an ageing population that is expected to continue into the near future.

The U.S. is experiencing some of those same factors in addition to a curious demographic. For perhaps the first time in its history, all of the age demographics are currently represented in the workforce at the same time.

In many countries, millennials are predicted to grow significantly in number through the next decade.

With all of these demographics in the workforce, any program aimed at candidates must factor in the widely differing skills, needs, and interests of these groups.

# What's wrong with the market?

The short answer is that it's all over the place. Some companies were dipping their toes into the virtual recruiting market a few years ago. Some were already good at it.

Bam! A global pandemic. Complete disruption and chaos. Companies had to throw the hiring playbook out the window and pivot to a completely new (and uncomfortable) process. Almost overnight.

**2020** - almost every company had to hire virtually. Whether they wanted to or not.

Okay. People, and strong companies, are adaptable. We learned to adapt and learned how to recruit virtually. Maybe not perfectly but at least acceptably.

**2021a.** – Good (?) news. We can do in-person interviewing again. Questionably good because it allows companies to go back to the comfortable vs. exploring new opportunities. And returning to “Uh oh! I can't subject Celebrity to *that* process!”

**2021b.** – Uh oh for a different reason. Some countries are experiencing another wave of COVID. Which impacts global candidates, travel, commerce, etc. Some municipalities are lessening restrictions, some aren't.

Pivot again. Is it any wonder that hiring professionals are so concerned about virtual recruiting?

**SIA** (Staffing Industry Analysts) discusses the results of a Monster report that asked global hiring professionals to identify their 2021 recruiting challenges

## Top 3 concerns:

- Skills gap
- Virtual recruitment
- The recruitment process

This is just about unprecedented. It's confusing, changing rapidly, and apparently, here to stay. The future is now. The hiring function must adapt.

In real estate, economic shifts create either a buyer's market or a seller's market. One or the other of these groups has bargaining power over the other.

And that's pretty much the same in the employment market.

In an article in **The Harvard Business Review** during 2020 lockdowns, the authors focused on a critical point. They characterised the job market as a *"sharp curve on a racetrack... that only appears once a decade or so"*. The knee-jerk reaction to rapid upticks or downturns in unemployment rates is usually to ramp up or scale back on hiring.

Big mistake.

The authors (and other experts) recommend using that racetrack to bypass other companies and use the same tactics you would use during a "candidate market" – woo them. Even when you don't need them. Yet.

They ask a simple but critical question.

***"How much is the right talent worth to you?"***

And that's the curve on the racetrack. Surviving, and more importantly thriving, after a pandemic disruption means questioning what companies are doing now and changing whatever isn't working.





Claudio Fernández-Aráoz discusses the slightly radical idea that **Now Is an Unprecedented Opportunity to Hire Great Talent** in his 2020 article in the Harvard Business Review. He contends that visionary leaders can take advantage of the changing talent pool to prepare their companies for the post-pandemic recovery.

He cites the example of the technology giant Hewlett-Packard (HP) during the 1940's economic downturn. When they were asked how they could afford to hire despite the economic challenges, their answer was true visionary: "How could we afford *not* to!"


Fernández-Aráoz describes their strategy with a very descriptive quote:

***"They bring in architects to plan the new building even as the firefighters work to save the old one."***

## Differentiation

Of course, it's critical to have a solid foundation before there's a chance of achieving superstar status. All the good intentions under the sun will be meaningless if the administrative stuff isn't being taken care of.

### ***The basics***

- 
- Even the most creative companies need to have rules and order. Ensure that policies, job descriptions, and expectations are clearly stated, both orally and in writing.
  - Some companies can pay lower wages and provide non-competitive benefits and still attract candidates. They may not have a competitive budget because they're non-profits or start-ups. Candidates are more likely to believe in the cause or hope to be involved in something big.
  - But the rest of the world must have an active, and pro-active, total compensation strategy.
  - Everyone not only expects to be treated fairly; they deserve to be. Promote a culture of fair treatment, diversity, and inclusion.
  - Communicate, encourage, and model the company's core values.

## ***Next level***

- Everybody loves a good employee engagement program. Especially employees! Although this should be more of a basic strategy, too many companies haven't yet recognised the value of involving employees in the life of the business. You definitely don't want employees disengaged. They're the low-hanging fruit that can be easily lured away by the competition.
- Take it a step further and seek employee as well as candidate input on the company's image. This can be a bit scary for employers. But, how do you know what to fix if you don't know what the most important people think?
- Civic-minded employees are not just appreciative but loyal to companies that care about their communities, the environment, and social issues.

With all these challenges, it's time for businesses to change how they view their internal talent and how they recruit new talent. Competition is fiercer than ever before and the same way of doing things will not suffice.





# What is your why?

Don't be fooled by the seemingly simple question and its accompanying answer. The response may be correct (to attract the best candidates, have candidates breaking down your door to work at your company, etc.).

Your objective is probably to hire the best candidates. And to retain them. Isn't that everyone's answer?

But why?

It may tie into your mission or vision statements, core values, UVP/ USP (Unique Value/Selling Proposition). It may be the current trend or the right thing to do.

But the proof will be in what the company is willing to do to get there. Giving candidates the Celebrity Red-Carpet treatment takes work, ingenuity, commitment, time. And probably money/ resources.

So, it's critical that companies understand that it's not a "program", or a "process", or an "initiative". It's a way of doing business. Just as companies must invest in new technology to deliver their product or service, they need to invest in their most important resource. More important really than any of the other investments – in real estate, training, machines, partnerships, or any other tangible things that make a company hum.

It's the people.

Sure payroll, benefits, training, perks, etc. are all a cost. An expensive one. But it's far more costly to mismanage those resources, lose them and have to replace them, or lose productivity because they're last on the list. Or getting only the standard attention.

Have you ever looked at those pictures that appear to be a bar code but when you tilt it a different way it actually has a message? Typically, something like, "Look at things in a different way".

And that's important to implementing a celebrity candidate experience. Knowing your why AND being prepared to do whatever it takes to realise it is critical.

Because we're going to ask you to change the way you look at the process.

This was always an important concept. And now it's one of the most critical ones in the workplace. So much has changed and so much more will change.

The pandemic was a true disruptor. Let's seize that opportunity and disrupt the ordinary. Make it extraordinary. And don't look back.

### ***Where's the UVP/USP?***

Branding is important. People remember clever ad campaigns. But they don't always remember the actual product, service or the company that offers them. So, where's the UVP/USP?

There really isn't one.

Transfer that idea to the employer/employee relationship. Employees may know about a company's reputation in their field – Nike sneakers, GEICO insurance, or, as in our example above – HP for computers and printers.

But that says nothing about their status as a great place to work. Having that designation is so important that websites, certifications, and award programs were created solely to identify companies that are great places to work.

**Best Workplaces in Europe 2020** is one of those sites where candidates can find companies that have consistently ranked high in employee surveys.

That's one of the ways that candidates find great employers.

# The challenge to find great talent

Admittedly, the pandemic changed the recruiting and hiring landscape dramatically. Candidates discovered that they just might have more choices than they did back in “the old days”. As in, the days when employees had to work for an employer within a reasonable commuting distance because their employer didn’t offer remote work.

Although many companies want their employees to go back into the office as soon as restrictions permit, employees are voting with their feet. “Oh, you don’t offer remote work? Here’s my 2-week notice. I’ve just been offered a job with a company on the other side of the world that offers remote.” (Or even just on the other side of town).

Of course, this isn’t the case with every job, employee, or company. But it is happening with many companies. Who aren’t prepared to deal with this shift in reality.

Although it may take some planning, brainstorming, and revamping, the answer is pretty simple. Competition is all about standing out from the rest of the group.





# Should companies try to find great candidates?

Or, should they LEAD those candidates to them?

In an article in [Forbes.com](https://www.forbes.com), service expert and author Geoff Ramm discusses his philosophy for world-class customer service. Using the acronym CELEBRITY, he asks the question, how would your customer service change if a Celebrity walked into your business?

It would probably change significantly because you, or your employees, would fall over yourselves to provide top-notch service.

What would happen if you did the same thing with your approach to hiring? Remember the question in the beginning of this guide? What would you do if your favourite celebrity applied for a job in your company?

## You'd treat them like a CELEBRITY!

Okay, so a celebrity isn't likely to walk into your place of business. But treating candidates as if they were celebrities, is exactly what other companies are NOT doing. As we've seen from the examples at HP and other visionary companies and leaders, difficult times are the right times to invest in people.

We've taken Ramm's concept and applied it to the challenges in hiring, in good times and bad.

Think again about your favourite celebrity and the things you'd do to make them feel special.

They'd need to feel like they're walking the red carpet where they're the main attraction and nothing is too good for them. They need to have a legendary experience.

How would you do it?



# **How to Give Candidates the Celebrity Treatment**



# Rolling out a Red Carpet Candidate Experience

There are many factors involved in building a red-carpet experience. Start at the beginning. Build or rework the current company culture. When the culture is right, employees and the goodwill that is generated as a result will sell it for you. Create a reputation.

Look at it from a Celebrity viewpoint. Where are the opportunities?

Get employees involved – at department and team levels as well as on the organisation level. Employees are the closest thing to experts about how candidates might feel coming into a new environment.

Conduct brainstorming sessions with no holds barred, with nothing too over-the-top. Assign a portion of the process to each team. Challenge them to think of new and creative ways to do things differently.

Make it fun for participants. Give prizes or rewards for the best, most innovative, craziest ideas. Use a suggestion box that employees can use for spontaneous or random ideas.

How about a mock-candidate experience with team members? Ask your team to pretend to go through the process and get their feedback and improvement suggestions. If you can make employees feel like a Celebrity, you can do it with candidates.

Use cross-departmental teams to improve the process. If there's a Six Sigma or process improvement expert in company, utilise their expertise.

The objective is to:

## *Delight them!*

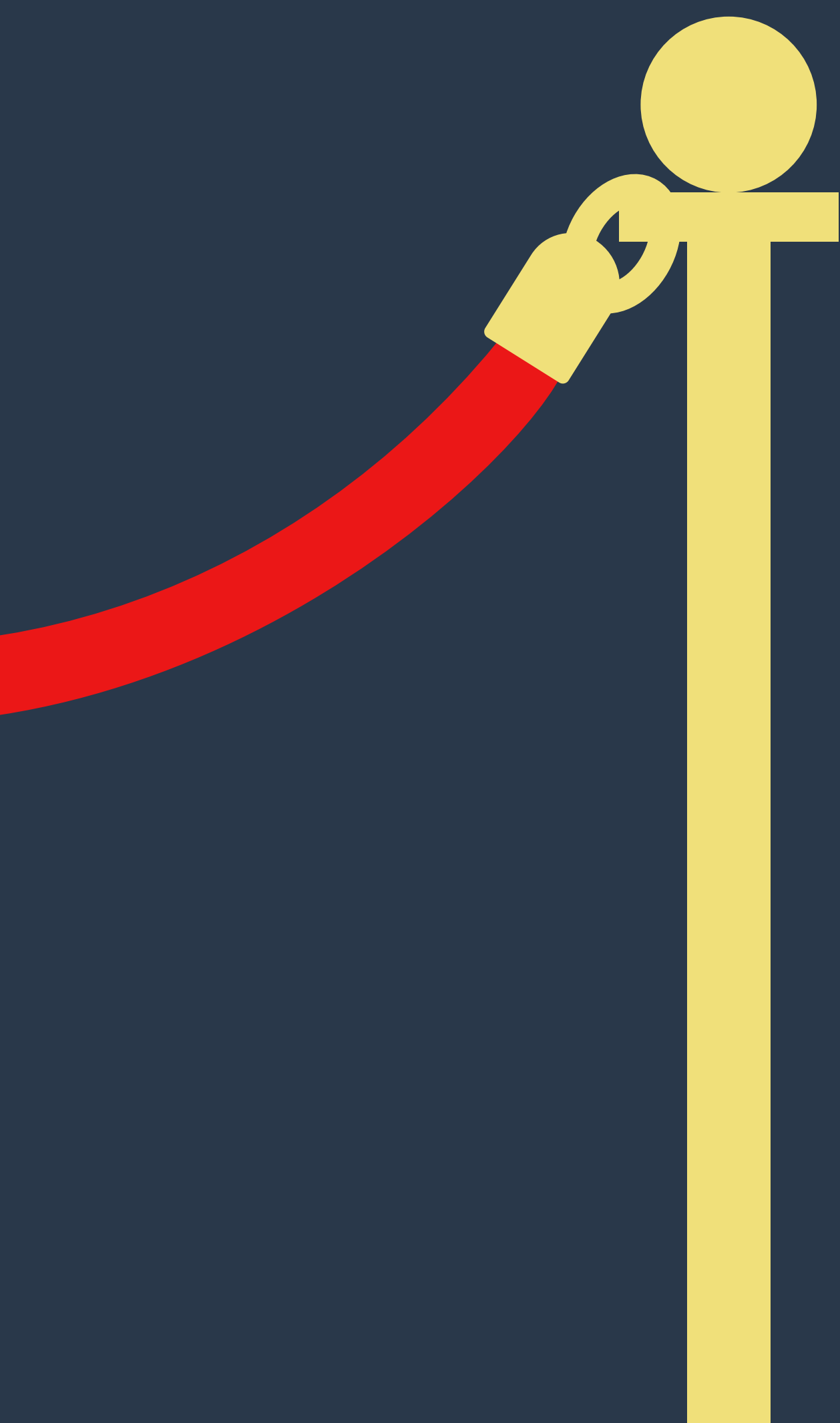
Think of times you've been delighted as a customer or recipient of a thoughtful gesture. It's unexpected, surprising, and delightful. It sets the tone for the whole day or experience. You're overwhelmed with the thoughtfulness of the action. A frequent reaction is that we feel it was unnecessary (but very appreciated) and we wonder what we did to deserve it. But it's virtually guaranteed to put a smile on your face.

## A Red-Carpet Celebrity experience needs to have at least the following elements:

- Maybe the first and most critical element – the support of senior leadership and through all levels of management. Talk the talk but most importantly walk the walk. Leaders have to be the driving force for any company-wide change to succeed. It can NOT be the flavour of the day.
- It must be a strongly held belief by all members of the team. Everyone wants to do it because they believe in the mission and vision. They must be engaged.
- A red-carpet experience must be excellent and strive for excellence. Perfection is not a realistic goal but always looking for the best solutions and willingness to try out new ideas is.
- A Celebrity wants to feel that their experience is exclusive to them. That's what makes it so special. The feeling that no one else gets such personalised treatment.
- An inclusive program welcomes and celebrates everyone. It recognises and has familiarity with differences in gender, religion, culture, etc. and works hard to make sure candidates feel like they're "home".
- When describing the experience, candidates need to feel exceptional. And to remember their hiring experience as incredible and extraordinary in every way.
- A Celebrity experience is intentional and purposeful. Be creative and imaginative in thinking of ways to delight the candidate.
- Above all, the experience should be memorable. A Celebrity candidate will never forget how your company went out of its way to treat them like an honoured guest.
- Adopt an attitude of saying "Yes!" to great ideas that will enhance the red-carpet treatment.

And who will they tell? Other great candidates.

Treating candidates as if they are celebrities means that you understand the challenges of finding and keeping good people. And you're willing to invest the time and knowledge required to treat them like the superstars they are.



# Start with Red-Carpet Treatment for applicants

First of all, respond to each candidate. Each and every one. It's not the favourite task for busy hiring professionals. Who has time for that? But companies must make time for it. The alternative is losing a potential future star. Or the friend of the candidate you didn't respond to. People talk. What do you want them saying about you?

If you get an unmanageable number of candidates (lucky you, by the way), brainstorm ways to manage them. Outsource the process. Reassign work to someone who can be the future Celebrity Candidate Handler. Hey, it could be a new role at your company.

Set up really good autoresponders for applicants. That don't sound canned. Use different languages for different scenarios and be human. And have a real person manage the process who can look for problem areas.

Give general suggestions for what the applicants or candidates can do to be considered in the future.

Assign a team member or manager to respond personally to qualified candidates that didn't make the final cut.  
Does all of this sound like forming relationships? Because it is.

We've put together a bunch of ideas in the next few pages of what you can do in your company to roll out the candidate red carpet at each stage of the process.



<div>ORDINARY TREATMENT</div> <div>RED-CARPET CANDIDATE TREATMENT</div>	
THE APPLICANT PROCESS	
Respond to applicants and candidates with the status of their application.	<div>Respond to every applicant. Use customised autoresponders to applicants not selected for interview.</div> <div>Assign a trained Celebrity Handler to contact good candidates not selected.</div> <div>Create a personalised and customised video for your best candidates that weren't selected so they can watch it at their leisure. Invite them to contact you by phone or email for more discussion.</div> <div>Provide information and feedback about what they might be able to do to prepare for future job openings at your company. Include info on training &amp; resources in the community as well as in the company.</div> <div>Provide online mini trainings about the culture, experience, or traits needed to prepare your best future stars.</div>
INVITATION TO MEET	
Recruiter or HR rep calls candidate to schedule an interview in a company conference room.	<div>Send candidates a personal, exclusive invitation to meet as your honoured guest. Treat it like it's an invitation to a movie premiere or dinner at a fine restaurant in their honour. Use "meeting" vs. "interview".</div> <div>Provide info that will help them prepare for the topics to discuss during the meeting, so they'll be more at ease.</div> <div>Provide a restaurant menu for meetings with meals.</div> <div>Send something personal to their home prior to the meeting. A personalised note, a small contribution to a worthy cause in their name, a sample of something the company makes, an invitation to a training, a small pre-meeting goody bag.</div>
FIRST MEETING	
Candidate name on marquee/board upon entering.	<div>If possible, go to where they are. Meet in a special place for the company. It could be by the employee hall of fame, company awards area, Invite them to participate in a team outing or fun training exercise.</div> <div>Celebrity Candidate Handler meets them in the foyer/outside the company and escorts them to the reception/meeting room. Even better, the Handler picks them up and delivers them to the meeting place. Or you send a car service, or taxi.</div> <div>Don't forget access for differently abled candidates! Make sure you've addressed their mobility, communication, language, food, and restroom needs or restrictions.</div> <div>Handler checks candidates' technical access (login credentials for presentations).</div>
Company tour.	
Name badge.	
Confirm first and last names, pronunciation, and spelling.	
Refreshments in reception/interview	

ORDINARY TREATMENT	RED-CARPET CANDIDATE TREATMENT
	<p>Offer to print copies of their C.V., PowerPoint deck, samples, etc. Provide a personalised folder or portfolio with the company’s logo and candidate’s name so they have a place for their documents.</p> <p>Provide device charging stations.</p> <p>Make sure there’s an umbrella stand/boots rack for inclement weather or have someone take their coat and boots. Provide an opportunity and place to freshen up. In the restroom, provide towels, scented soaps, makeup, mouthwash, cologne/perfume, lotion, deodorant, sanitary needs.</p> <p>Give them an Honorary Guest badge so everyone in the facility recognizes them as a guest.</p>
	<p>Ensure all employees know that a Celebrity is in the house! Send an announcement that day with the candidate’s name. Encourage employees to welcome candidates by name as honoured guests and exchange pleasantries/discuss their job.</p> <p>Foster contagious enthusiasm. Every single time the door opens in a particular U.S. fast-food restaurant chain, employees enthusiastically shout out in unison - “Welcome to Moe’s!” (Moe’s Southwest Grill). Instant customer service.</p> <p>Specialty drinks, gourmet treats, candidates’ favourite treats.</p>
SELECTION OF CANDIDATE	
<p>Nice phone call from HR or manager and accompanying letter offering the position.</p>	<p>A representative of leadership with HR/manager calls with job offer.</p> <p>Invite new-hire to a welcome meeting/party to answer questions, meet the team, mingle, and generally thank them for joining your team.</p>

# More extraordinary ideas

## In person meetings:

If your company is truly inclusive, you'll have indications on display at all times. Candidates will see that and know they're in an environment that is welcoming to them.

Ask candidates what they will need during their visit. Make sure they have total accessibility. Don't forget restroom needs, sign language/other interpreters, religious/dietary needs.

Have a prominent welcome sign in their primary language as well as the company's.

## Remote meetings:

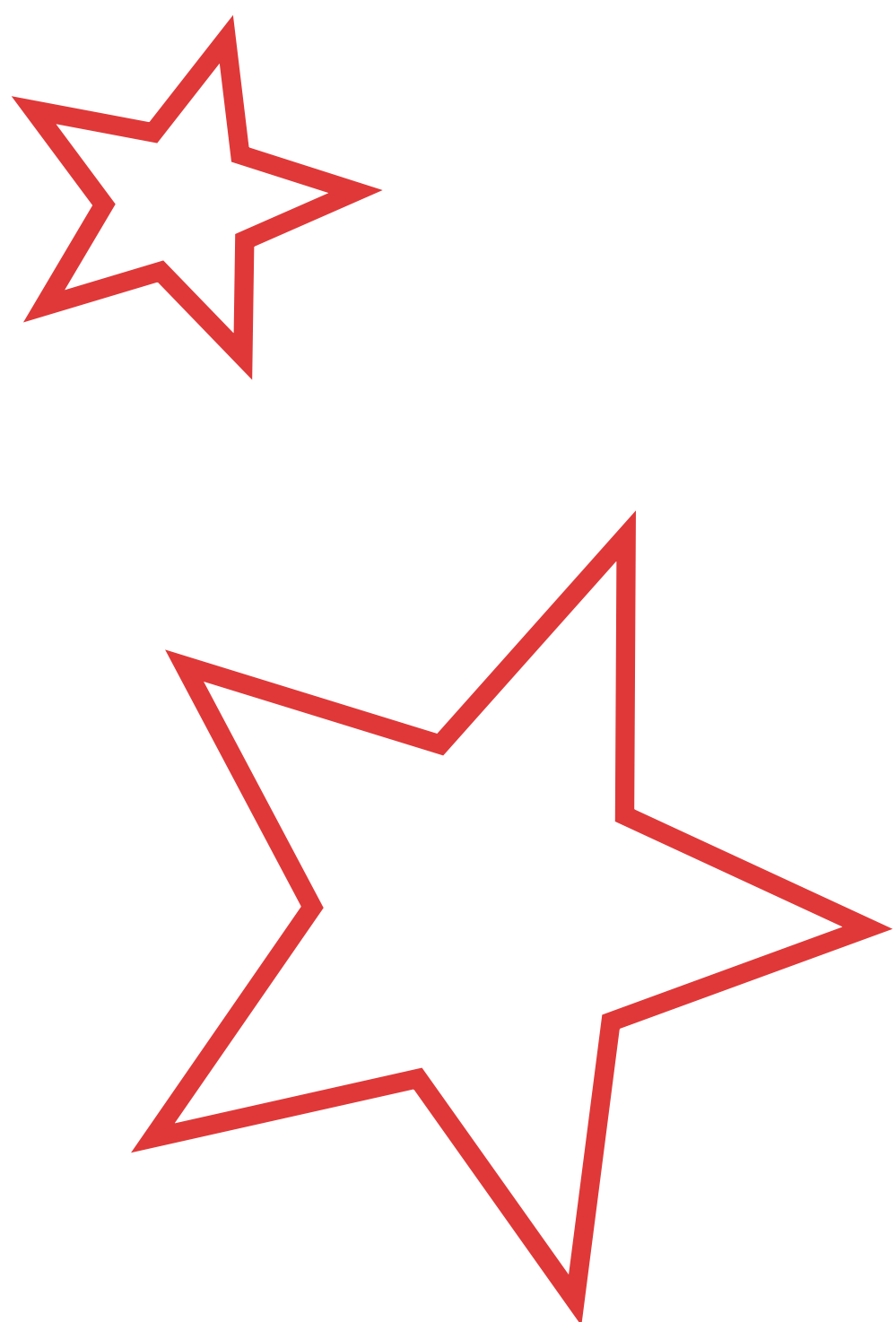
The challenge for remote meetings is to provide the same level of Celebrity treatment as for in-person meetings.

Do a virtual "live" company tour so the candidate can see and interact with employees in real-time.

If possible, send a representative of the company to a meeting place in the Celebrity's locale who can participate in the video meeting.

If distances are significant, collaborate with a business in their location that will host the meeting and provide personalised services on your behalf – a spa, fine restaurant, prestigious business, private club, first-class lounge, virtual office.

Send the Celebrity package of goodies to the candidate's home in advance or to the hosting company to use to welcome your guest.



# Is it really worth all of this trouble for candidates?

We're in a competition for talent. Provide what the candidate wants.

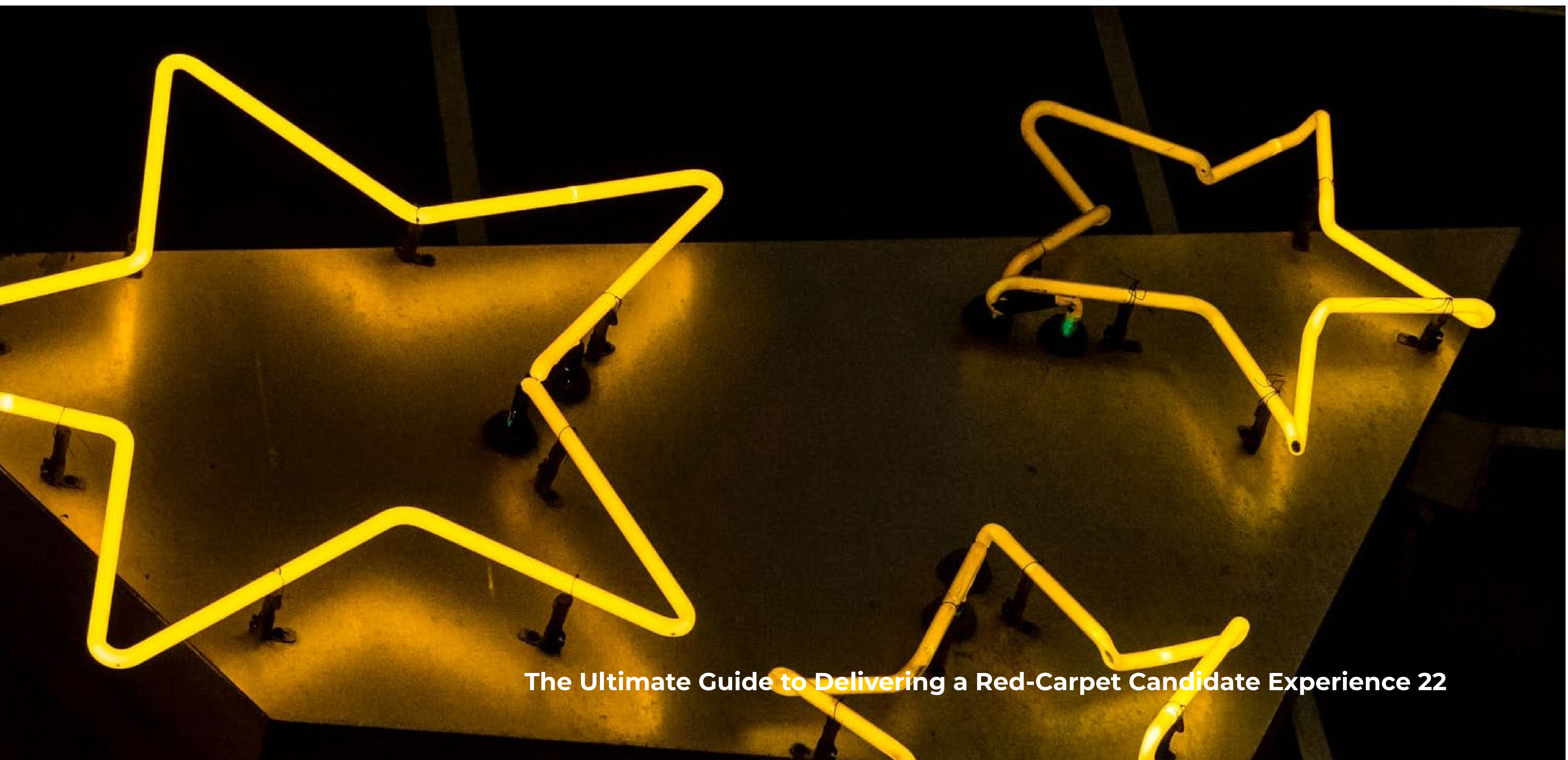
Candidates may be future employees. We forget who other people may know. They may have friends or family that might be future candidates. Make sure they're sharing the right message.

The first impression many candidates get of a company may be their online presence. Is it updated and has relevant, current information? Is it easy to use? Can candidates get answers at any time? Can they submit questions, upload their resume/CV or other documents in the middle of the night?

Does it provide a good overview of working at the company? Links, resources, current news?

Socially conscious and committed candidates will also be looking for an organisation's stated values vs. their real-life actions.

Have you ever thought of employees/candidates as internal customers? The term is used a lot but mostly only superficially with no action behind it. What does that really mean to your organisation?



# What is the competition doing?

On the one hand, it doesn't really matter. The intent of delighting candidates is personalised to each company per their culture, mission, vision, etc.

However, it's always a particularly good idea to know what's happening in the marketplace to:

1. Make sure you're doing at least that much
2. "Steal" ideas (in a friendly ethical way!) after all in the words of Steve Jobs "good artists borrow, great artists steal"
3. Benchmark in general the type of red-carpet treatment the competitions is providing and the results
4. Learn how your company can provide a better alternative to candidates in similar, competitive markets

In case companies are thinking they're the first ones doing it in their space or that they've already got it figured out, consider the following statistics from **SmallBizGenius**:

- The applicant rate increases 34% when a job posting uses a video. Is your company doing this?
- 51% of hiring professionals believe that work flexibility attracts candidates. This is the new buzzphrase post-pandemic. Employers who don't offer this will find it difficult to compete with companies that provide strong remote working programs.
- 80% of HR leaders feel employer branding significantly impacts the ability to attract talent. Not surprising. People like to align themselves with a "winner".

Disappointingly, a majority of companies surveyed felt they did a good job communicating expectations but less than half of the candidates agreed. Similarly, a large number of candidates want more information about the timeline of the hiring process.

An overwhelming number of candidates expect an employer's website to provide key information. And interestingly, candidates actually read multiple reviews on the company before forming an opinion about the company.



# Conclusion

Attracting the best candidates was difficult enough in the years before 2020. It has reached critical proportions now. In some sectors, there is sky-rocketing competition for talent. Candidates have more choices with the proliferation of remote work and are increasingly voting with their feet. They're becoming more frustrated with clunky selection and on-boarding processes and are opting out after being hired.

There are so many ways to provide an extraordinary experience to your Celebrity. Think outside the box and put yourself in their shoes. What would "wow" you?

What are they worth to you? To the success of your business?

A personalised experience creates an instantly favourable impression. Continuing that treatment throughout a candidate's employment is worth every penny spent on making that impression.

It starts with a simple enough concept. Really knowing how to treat someone as an honoured guest.

Remember their name. They'll remember you.

**"A person's name is to him or her the sweetest and most important sound in any language."**  
– *Dale Carnegie*



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Occupop is a beautifully simple recruitment software built for small and medium businesses. We help businesses be great at hiring through our simple philosophy – to make recruitment incredibly easy and accessible to everyone at work.

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