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RECRUITMENT

Kid-glove approach woos new grads



'Touchy-feely' tactics can pay off big in luring top young talent, VIRGINIA GALT writes

With an MBA from McGill University in Montreal and fluency in three languages, Nadia Ramos knew she had a world of opportunities open to her when she graduated in 2003.

But there was no contest when it came to sorting through them — Bank of Nova Scotia won the competition for her, hands down.

Ms. Ramos was attracted by the promise of an overseas field assignment within her first two years. She was also impressed that Scotiabank brought her to Toronto "for a panel interview with senior managers in commercial banking — a very unique experience."

But it was actually the small things that cemented her decision. "You walk around afterward and see where you are going to be working, not only the boardroom, but the actual cubicles."

She was introduced to her fellow international banking associates, who immediately welcomed her to the fold and offered apartment-hunting advice.

Such "touchy-feely stuff" makes a great difference in attracting today's sought-after graduates, Scotiabank has found. And it is not the only major Canadian employer to adopt a kid-glove approach with the new generation of employees.

Several companies, including Hamilton, Ont.-based steel maker Dofasco Inc., dispatch "student ambassadors" to recruit their peers and advocate for their interests; others assign senior employees to act as buddies and mentors once newcomers sign on.

The wooing of young talent takes other forms as well: sending the top brass, instead of a résumé-collecting clerk, to campus recruitment events; taking the time to introduce new hires to co-workers before they even begin their jobs; explaining how important the young employee's role is to an employer's overall corporate mission.

"The touchy-feely stuff pays divi-



FERNANDO MORALES/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Nadia Ramos, left, and Carlos Escamilla at Scotiabank: The bank's commitment to its young hires' professional development gave it the edge over other potential employers.

Students will eat the free pizza but won't necessarily swallow the company pitch.

dends: Making candidates feel special helps persuade the best ones to take the offer," says a North American survey of 28,000 new hires at 50 companies that was conducted by Washington, D.C.-based research firm Corporate Executive Board Co. last year.

Based on this research and other focus group insights into the twentysomething mind, Scotiabank has adopted a comprehensive approach to recruiting and nurturing its future leaders.

Through a process known in human resources circles as "onboarding," Scotiabank provides heavy support to its new recruits in their first two years of employment — assigning them buddies, rotating

them through different business functions and providing language training, among other things.

Dofasco's student ambassador program and Scotiabank's tender treatment of its new recruits rank among the best practices of companies that regularly scout Canadian universities and college for top new talent, campus career centre managers say.

The bank's commitment to its young hires' professional development gave Scotiabank the edge over other employers competing to attract Ms. Ramos and her colleague, Carlos Escamilla, who graduated in 2002 with an MBA from École des Hautes Études Commerciales de Montréal (HEC Montréal).

Both, now working in Toronto, opted for careers in international banking, with Ms. Ramos choosing her first rotation in international human resources and her second in global risk management, and Mr. Escamilla starting with strategic planning and moving into interna-

tional mergers and acquisitions.

"It's a very, very exciting opportunity," he says.

Ms. Ramos, a Montreal native, speaks English, French and Portuguese — and the bank is paying for Spanish lessons. Mr. Escamilla, a native of Colombia, speaks English, French and Spanish.

One of the bank's biggest challenges is to keep its high-potential recruits like Ms. Ramos and Mr. Escamilla feeling challenged and engaged, its HR executives say.

Hiring them is just the start, says Sylvia Chrominska, executive vice-

president of human resources.

"We have to make sure, once they are in the door, that they start having a great experience as an employee — and that we haven't over-promised. . . ."

"Employees have much different expectations of employment now. Gen X and Gen Y need to find work challenging. The really capable ones have much more choice: They have worldwide access to job opportunities," Ms. Chrominska says.

"And they ask tough questions: How soon will I be able to make a move, what kind of training am I

going to be offered?" The bank makes a point of ensuring those kinds of questions get answers.

It is no longer enough for employers to turn up at university recruitment events assuming that students will leap at the chance to work for them, adds Anne Markey, manager of engineering career services at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ont.

Students will eat the free pizza but won't necessarily swallow the company pitch, Ms. Markey says.

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Employers turn to 'onboarding'

It used to be that the orientation process for new employees involved a quick tour, hurried introductions and a desk assignment.

However, some employers concerned about turnover are now going to much greater lengths to help their recruits settle in, through a process known as "onboarding," according to Drake International Inc., which provides staffing and human resources consulting services.

This onboarding process "begins the moment the candidate first connects with the company," and continues long after the employee has been hired, says a report recently distributed by Drake International's Toronto office.

"Although they are just beginning to learn about the organization, they are forming their first impressions, which will carry over to every facet of the interviewing, hiring and employment process," Drake said in releasing its report.

At stage one — before an offer has even been made — the candidate is evaluating the employer just as critically as the employer

is evaluating the candidate, the Drake report said.

"A hiring process that involves a variety of people in the interview phase helps a prospective employee get a sense of the company culture and the realities of the position. . . ." Drake's report said.

"By giving the candidate a realistic overview of what a 'day in the life' of their new role will be like, you are giving the prospective employee a fair chance to adequately evaluate the opportunity. If they decide that the position is unsuitable, then you have saved the time and costs associated with hiring and training," the report added.

At stage two, when the offer is extended, the employee should be given a customized package including detailed information about compensation, benefits, "a detailed job description and performance metrics."

At this stage, the candidate should also be taken on a tour, shown where he or she will be working and introduced to colleagues.

"If this is done prior to their first

day on the job, they will start already feeling accustomed to their new environment."

At stage three, the first day, new employees arrive at work "with a mixture of excitement, nerves and enthusiasm."

Managers make the common mistake of trying "to cram all of the relevant information into that first day" instead of putting new employees at ease and gradually working them in, Drake said.

Stage four, the orientation stage, should be spread out for as long as the employee needs support to get a handle on the company objectives, the specifics of his or her role — and how that role contributes to the overall success of the organization, Drake's report said.

"New hires can shift from being 'new kids on the block' to key contributors faster with more effective onboarding and orientation programs," the firm advised.

On the other hand, "a non-existent or poorly planned orientation program can turn a carefully recruited employee into another turnover statistic."

Virginia Galt

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