



New York Society of Association Executives



Creating an Employer of Choice Association

By Michael Cummings

"I heard that's a great place to work!"

How many times throughout the course of your career have you heard a similar statement, or its opposite? Ten? Twenty? One hundred? Such statements today are playing an increasingly pivotal role in attracting and retaining top association talent.

As the job market has shifted from employer-driven to candidate-driven, an association's employer brand—its reputation as a place to work—has become a key driver for successful recruitment.

Addressing a standing-room-only crowd, I, along with Arlene Pietranton, PhD, FASAE, CAE, CEO, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA); Addy Kujawa, CAE, Executive Director, American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons (AAOE); and Susan Avery, CAE, CEO, International Association of Plastics Distribution (IAPD) discussed the challenges and solutions regarding candidate identification, staff retention, and becoming an employer of choice association.

According to the Society for Human Resources Management (SHRM), an employer of choice is "an employer whose practices, policies, benefits and overall work conditions have enabled it to successfully attract and retain talent because employees choose to work there."

The benefits of becoming an employer of choice are that people are eager to work for you; you receive

unsolicited resumes; and your most talented workers might stay with the organization throughout their careers.

Findings from the *2015 Employer Branding Report** provide additional interesting information:

- More than 68% of employees consider themselves disengaged from their jobs;
- More than 71% of the job market is open to a new job at any time;
- More than 40% of the job market will not apply for a job if they cannot so do via their mobile devices;
- 67% of job candidates would accept an offer lower than their bottom line compensation requirements if they discovered an exceptional employer review online.

Where are candidates finding such reviews online? While employers are still Googling job candidates, resources such as [Glassdoor](#), [CareerBliss](#), and [Indeed](#) are leaving indelible marks on the perception of your association to potential talent before they even engage with you at a first interview. Once considered little more than a rant site, Glassdoor now promotes itself as the "world's most transparent career community." With more than eight million employer reviews, it has evolved into the top site for job seekers to vet potential employers.

Ultimately, if you're not managing the perception of your employer brand a handful of former and current employees will do it for you.

What can you do? First, recognize that while an employer branding strategy requires the resources of marketing and communications staff, it's not up to them: Urgency for employer branding must be driven by the highest level of staff leadership.

After you have buy in from leadership, you should craft a strategic employer branding plan that includes an assessment of your association's anticipated talent assets and deficits over the next several years. A clear picture of your association's human capital strengths and weaknesses will help inform your employer brand messaging.

Then, take a deep breath and dive into your employer brand audit. The objective is to produce a sober and unbiased snapshot of your association and to determine a baseline by which to measure the impact of employer branding efforts. The elements assessed may include employer review sites, social media conversations, employee surveys, exit interview documentation, and focus groups. As tempting as it may be, don't fall into the trap of trying to guess which former—or current—staffer said what about the association. What's done is done and what you want to focus on is identifying recurring patterns and themes uncovered by the audit.

Once you have a solid understanding of the market's perception of your association as an employer, you can begin to craft and implement an appropriate tactical plan. Your employer branding plan may include addressing negative reviews, publishing positive staff stories on your association's website, and publicizing unique benefits to influencers. Or you may discover that you need to take a step back and focus on internal issues that require longer-term solutions.

Regardless of the details of your employer branding plan, all of it is for naught without a commitment to

creating an authentic work environment. A culture of authenticity is one where the employer brand promise is kept daily to staff. "What's the point of attracting talent by talking the talk if you're not walking the walk? You'll improve your staff retention rates if you strive for authenticity in your employer brand.

IAPD's Avery created an authentic culture out of necessity. Based in Kansas City, Missouri, she found that while she could not compete for talent on compensation, she certainly could on culture. Therefore, every day at IAPD is business casual ("save your dry cleaning for your wedding," says Avery), pets are allowed in the office, and she certainly doesn't manage by the timecard. Avery also tends to seek out the candidate who may be ready for new responsibilities and tired of waiting for his or her name to be called in a larger corporate environment.

The 2015 Employer Branding Report also highlights that today there are four generations working side-by-side. Managers, therefore, should adopt a varied approach to their intergenerational teams. AAOE's Kujawa rolled out unique solutions for her largely millennial team. "Millennials are young and eager and engage more when they are included," said Kujawa. She discovered that a simple, transparent action such as inviting her entire staff to board meetings has resulted in increased retention. "My team feels important, is part of the conversation, and gains further understanding as to how AAOE operates."

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l to r: Arlene Pietranton, PhD, FASAE, CAE, CEO, American Speech-Language-Hearing Association; Michael Cummings, MBA, Principal, Tate/Cummings; Addy Kujawa, CAE, Executive Director, American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons; and Susan Avery, CAE, CEO, International Association of Plastics Distribution.

Pietranton, who has seen ASHA honored with numerous "Best Places to Work" media accolades and awards during her time as its CEO, said of workplace culture: "One cannot over acknowledge the role that culture plays in all business decisions. Culture trumps all. Your culture is your brand. Therefore, wouldn't you rather have a thoughtful and positive culture by design?"

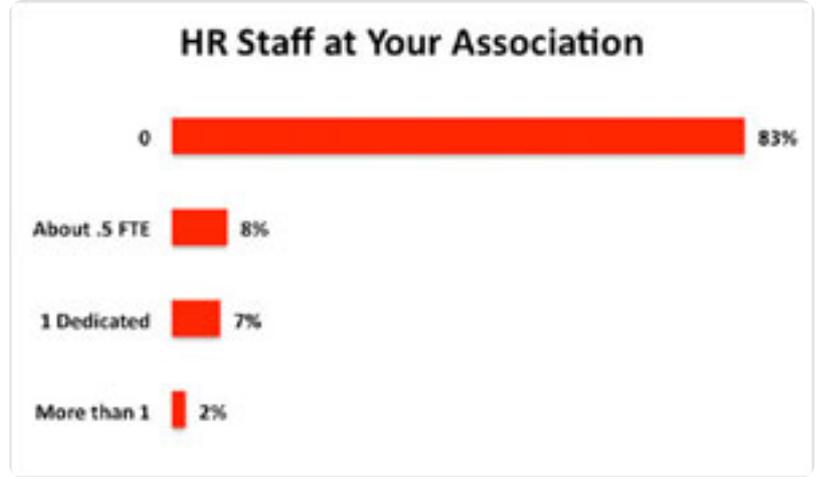
More than two thirds of the attendees at ASAE's Creating an Employer of Choice Association session expressed that they do not have a dedicated human resources professional on staff, closely mirroring the responses of 83% of associations in the 2015 Employer Branding Report and further compounding the culture conundrum. Fortunately, Avery, Cummings, Kujawa, and Pietranton had all seen an uptick in staff referrals for open positions, somewhat taking the onus off HR. Pietranton, for one, hired 34 staff in 2014 and identified 12 of those hires

through staff referrals. (Are you really going to recommend a friend or loved one to work somewhere you don't love?)

*Numerous resources were utilized by Tate/Cummings in developing the *2015 Association and Nonprofit Employer Branding Report*, including: a survey of more than 500 association and nonprofit staff; The 2014 Employer Branding Summit; The 2014-15 PNP Nonprofit Survey and Salary

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Report; *Psychology Today*; 2014 Career Builder Candidate Behavior Study; Society for Human Resource Management; US Census Bureau; *Harvard Business Review*; 2014 MRI Network Recruiter Sentiment Study; *Forbes*; Deloitte University Press; and more than 30 interviews with association and nonprofit staff. A free copy of the seven-page report is available for free download at <http://bit.ly/1DC8ZaU>.



Source: 2015 Employer Branding Report

Note: This article is based on discussions led by the author at ASAE's 2015 Great Ideas! Conference, ASAE's Finance, HR & Business Operations Conference and continued at ASAE's 2015 Annual meeting.

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