Creating an Amazing Candidate Experience

Your Guide and 2018 Planning Checklist

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What's Inside:

Intro

There was a time when employers merely had to post a job description, and resumes would come flooding in. Recruiters could go weeks without responding to job seekers, and they'd still happily come in for interviews. Hiring managers could be late or disorganized. But candidates would still gratefully accept offers.

Those days are gone—and they're not coming back any time soon.

Today, hiring is a buyer's market. With the unemployment rate routinely hitting record lows and companies in almost every industry creating new jobs, professionals have more options than ever before. Plus, employer review sites have given job seekers unprecedented access to information—information that employers can rarely control. These conditions mean today's job seekers are choosier than ever. In fact, the ratio of unemployed Americans to open jobs is just 1.4 to one. During the last recession in 2009, however, that ratio was 6.6 to one. As a result, job openings are staying open longer—28.1 days on average as of 2016. So it's easy to see why a staggering 90 percent of recruiters surveyed by MRI Network said that today's talent market is driven by candidates, not employers.

To stay competitive in today's talent landscape, companies of all sizes need to invest in improving their candidate experiences in 2018. Doing so isn't always easy or obvious, but don't worry. We've got your back.

Candidate Experience Matters More Than You Think

78%

of candidates report that their candidate experience is an indicator of how the potential employer values its people

Every interaction someone has with your brand falls within the candidate experience, even if they're not yet a candidate. CareerXroads has defined no fewer than 18 distinct touch points in the candidate journey, and getting each one right is critical. If you're skeptical, consider this: Some 78 percent of candidates report that their candidate experience is an indicator of how the potential employer values its people. That means they're evaluating you as a possible employer at every step, and most of the evaluation process occurs once a job seeker is actively looking for new opportunities.

The impressions they get from your job description and careers site are key, as are the communications they receive (or, in many cases, don't receive) from your recruiting team. And if they're invited into the office for an interview, how they perceive your workspace, their potential co-workers, and even their would-be boss can play a role in shaping their perception of your brand.

In short, your candidate experience extends to every possible interaction a candidate can have with you. To be successful, you've got to refine and manage each touch point effectively. Some companies have adapted and become more sophisticated in their approach to the candidate experience. Those that haven't, however, are increasingly in danger of being left behind.
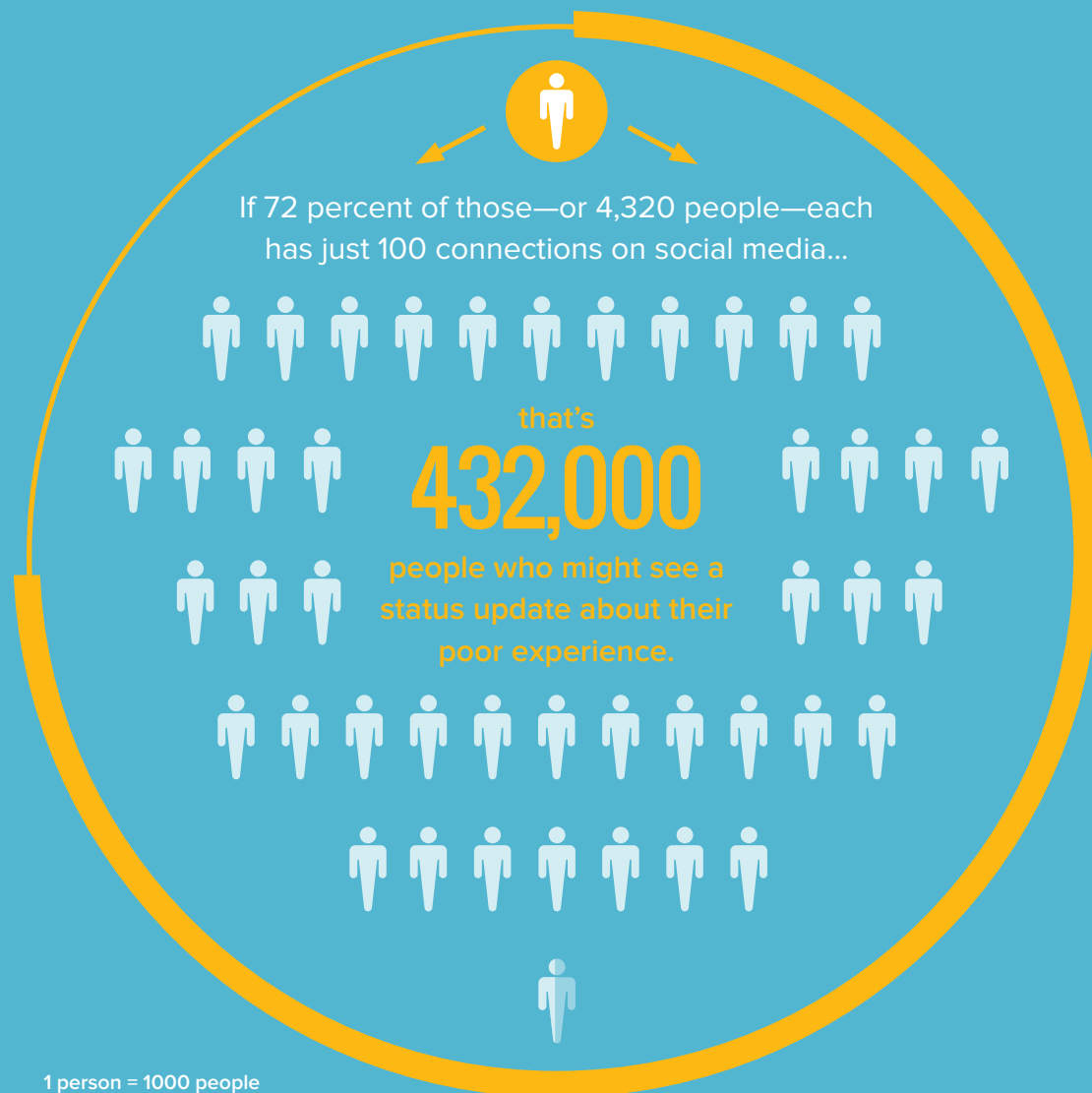
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Why a Great Candidate Experience Matters

Today's job seekers treat the job search the same way they treat a major purchase, and they react to a negative candidate experience as they would a poor consumer experience. While consumer marketers understand this and place tremendous value on creating a positive consumer experience, not everyone's doing the same when it comes to potential hires.

In fact, according to CareerArc's candidate experience survey, nearly **60 percent of candidates surveyed said they'd had a poor candidate experience.** Seventy-two percent of those respondents said they shared their negative experience online or with someone directly. **Another 60 percent reported spending at least an hour on research and resume prep prior to applying.** In short: Today's job seekers are informed, invested and more than willing to discuss their own candidate experiences—both good and bad—online.

Imagine that a company receives **10,000** applications a year.

If 60 percent of those candidates had negative experiences, that company now has **6,000** potential detractors.

If 72 percent of those—or 4,320 people—each has just 100 connections on social media...

that's **432,000** people who might see a status update about their poor experience.

1 person = 1000 people

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Candidate Experience Matters More Than You Think

"After the hours a candidate spends researching a potential employer, the experience has to be great once they reach the application stage," states Lisa Cervenka, Employer Brand Evangelist, The Muse. When it is, your company will see immediate benefits. In fact, companies that invest in improving their candidate experience improve their quality of hires by 70 percent.

But when it's not, you risk more than losing a potential hire. If that applicant shares their bad experience with their networks, you may lose an untold number of future hires as well. You may even lose customers in the process. And even if an applicant does hang on through a chaotic experience and accept an offer, they're likely to have lost critical morale and trust in the company.

With so much at stake, you can't afford to give this short shift. Here's a step-by-step guide for creating a powerful and effective candidate experience.

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Improving Your Candidate Experience One Step at a Time

> *"*
> *Control whatever communication you can, because there's a lot out there that won't be within your control."*

— Lisa Cervenka,
Employer Brand Evangelist at The Muse

Lay the Groundwork

The foundation of a great candidate experience is effective messaging. And to be effective, it needs to be honest and transparent. **Job seekers can smell inauthenticity a mile away, just as they can when they're in consumer mode.** So make sure the messaging on your careers site, social channels, and job descriptions follows suit.

Start by surveying your current employees about what they think about your company's culture. Ask them (anonymously) about your best and worst qualities as an employer, as well as about their own candidate experience.

Examine the survey results, and if they don't align with your current messaging, it's time to change things up. Use your findings to update your communications, and consider using employee focus groups to evaluate whether or not they find the new version accurate. **You won't be able to do this overnight, so start now.**

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Refine Your Process

Once your messaging is cohesive across all your channels, it's time to look inward. To create a seamless candidate experience, you've got to refine your hiring process—and that starts with documenting what, exactly, it is.

Determine, for example, who is responsible for scheduling phone screens and in-person interviews. Define when hiring managers need to get involved, and make it clear exactly what they need to do and when. **And don't forget to identify who's responsible for holding your team and the hiring managers accountable at each stage.**

Speaking of hiring managers, they're a key part of the candidate experience, and they're often where the process breaks down. That's understandable—there's a lot on their plates, and interviewing is only a small part of their jobs. **But if hiring managers aren't responsive to candidates or fully engaged in the process, you risk losing key candidates.**

Set aside time to train your hiring managers on what your employer brand is and how they can communicate it throughout the interview process. Make clear what's at stake, and be sure they understand how frustrating it can be for candidates when they're unresponsive or unprepared. They've got to be just as invested in creating a great experience as you are.

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Create an Immersive Candidate Experience

Another way to improve your candidate experience is to get in front of potential applicants early and often. The best way to do that is to **create content that showcases your employer brand and informs applicants about your company character, culture, and hiring process.**

Toni Thompson, Vice President of People and Talent at The Muse, stressed the importance of candidate-focused content. According to her, candidate experience content should fall into two categories: **"inform" and "engage."**

"Inform" content should:

- **Educate your candidates about your hiring process**
- **Help them understand who they'll be meeting with at each stage and why**
- **Give them insight into where they are in the process, and what happens next**

Content in this category could include a one-sheeter that clearly lays out the steps of your hiring process, short videos explaining what happens at each stage, or a blog post explaining the kinds of experience you generally look for.

"Engage" content should:

- **Give applicants a sense of your company culture and values**
- **Provide insight into the day-to-day experience in your workplace**
- **Showcase real employees who recently went through the hiring process**

For this category, consider creating videos in which recent hires discuss their own candidate experiences, blog posts highlighting company-sponsored events and "day in the life" stories featuring employees discussing their workdays.

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But just creating content isn't enough. You need to share it at key moments during an applicant's journey. **Since 65 percent of candidates report that they're rarely—or never—notified about the status of their application,** maximizing touchpoints will help set you apart from the competition. So make a plan for what gets shared when, and determine who's responsible for sharing it.

Sharing content is also critical for avoiding the infamous "black hole." Having assets candidates can read, watch, and engage with during the process will keep them from feeling left in the dark.

Make A Plan

For what gets shared when, and determine
who's responsible for sharing it.

CANDIDATE STAGE	CONTENT TO SHARE
Application	**One-sheeter:** "Our Hiring Process"
Phone screen	"What We Look for in Candidates"
In-person interview	**Video:** "A Day in the Life at Our Company"
Second in-person interview	"Our Q4 Giving Back Outing"
Offer	**Video:** "5 Employees Share What They Love About Working Here"
Acceptance	"What to Expect on Your First Day"
Rejection	**One-sheeter:** "A No Today Isn't a No Forever: How to Stay in Touch"

Make Personalization a Priority

This one is simple. When you reach out to candidates, be personal. It may slow your process down a bit, but a little work on your communications will lead to more invested candidates. And whenever possible, **resist the temptation to blast out templated communications without customizing them.** They may be a quick and easy way for your team to respond to job seekers, but candidates will see right through them.

Cervenka, who applies to jobs as hobby (yes, really!) recently got a text message from a company. While that sounds like a good thing, the substance of the message was way off the mark.

"This text told me they had rejected my resume because I was under-qualified," she said. "But I was actually very over-qualified. It's clear that their ATS just booted my resume because it didn't contain the keywords they were looking for. My resume was clearly not read by a human."

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— **Lisa Cervenka,**
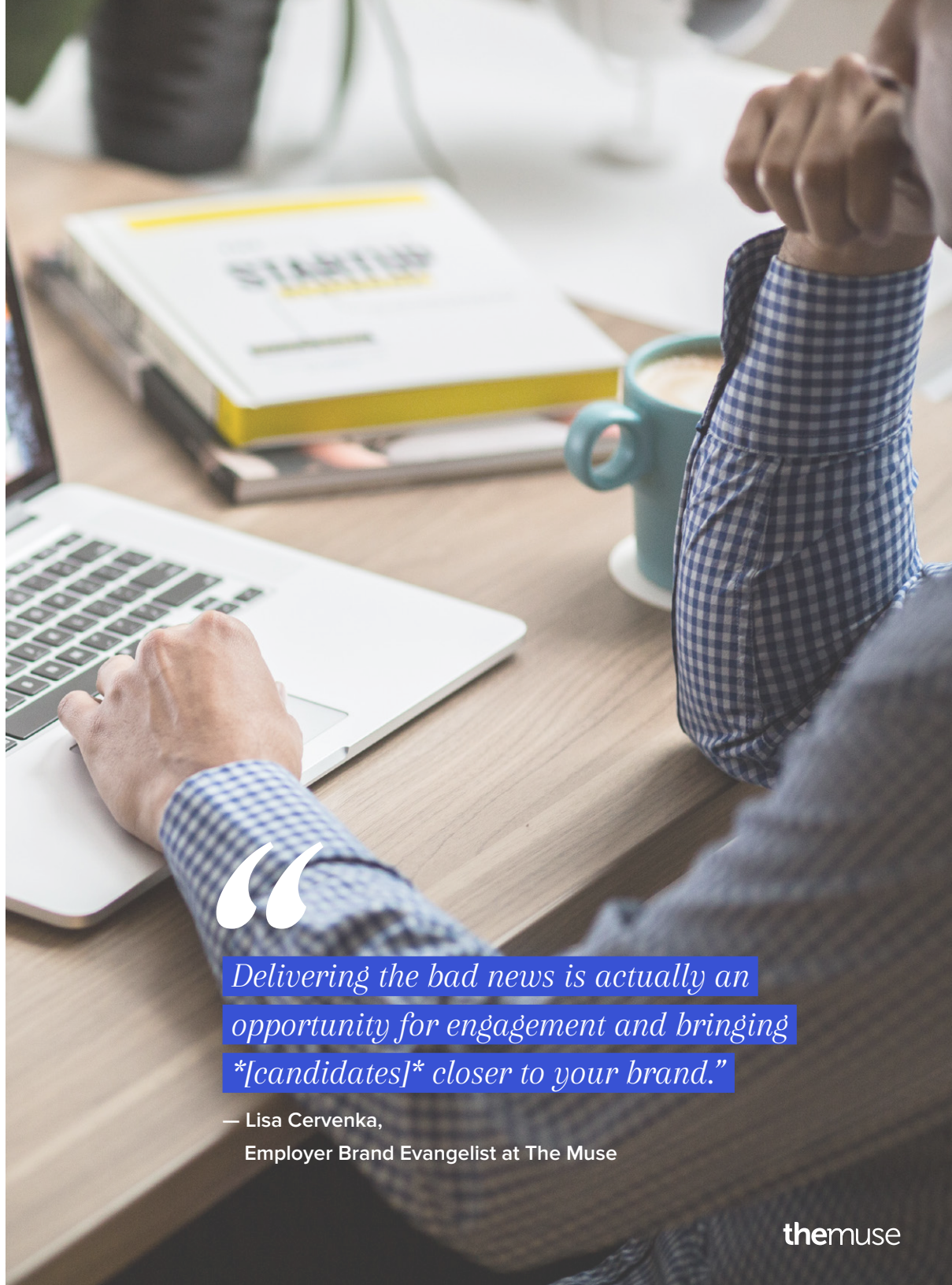**Employer Brand Evangelist at The Muse**

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Rejections are an Opportunity

Telling a candidate they aren't getting the interview—
or the job—is a tough part of a recruiter's job. But
remember, getting a "no" isn't exactly fun for the
applicant, either. **A rejection will never be good news,
but it doesn't have to discourage an applicant or
keep them from applying to other openings.**

"Companies are very skittish about giving honest
feedback during the rejection process," Cervenka
noted. "They're often unsure what they can and can't
say. Plus, it's time consuming—but it's also critical. The
job search is a stressful process, so it's really important
to give applicants a fast 'no.'"

That means giving them the news as soon as you've
made the decision, no matter where they are in the
process. And Cervenka stressed that **you shouldn't
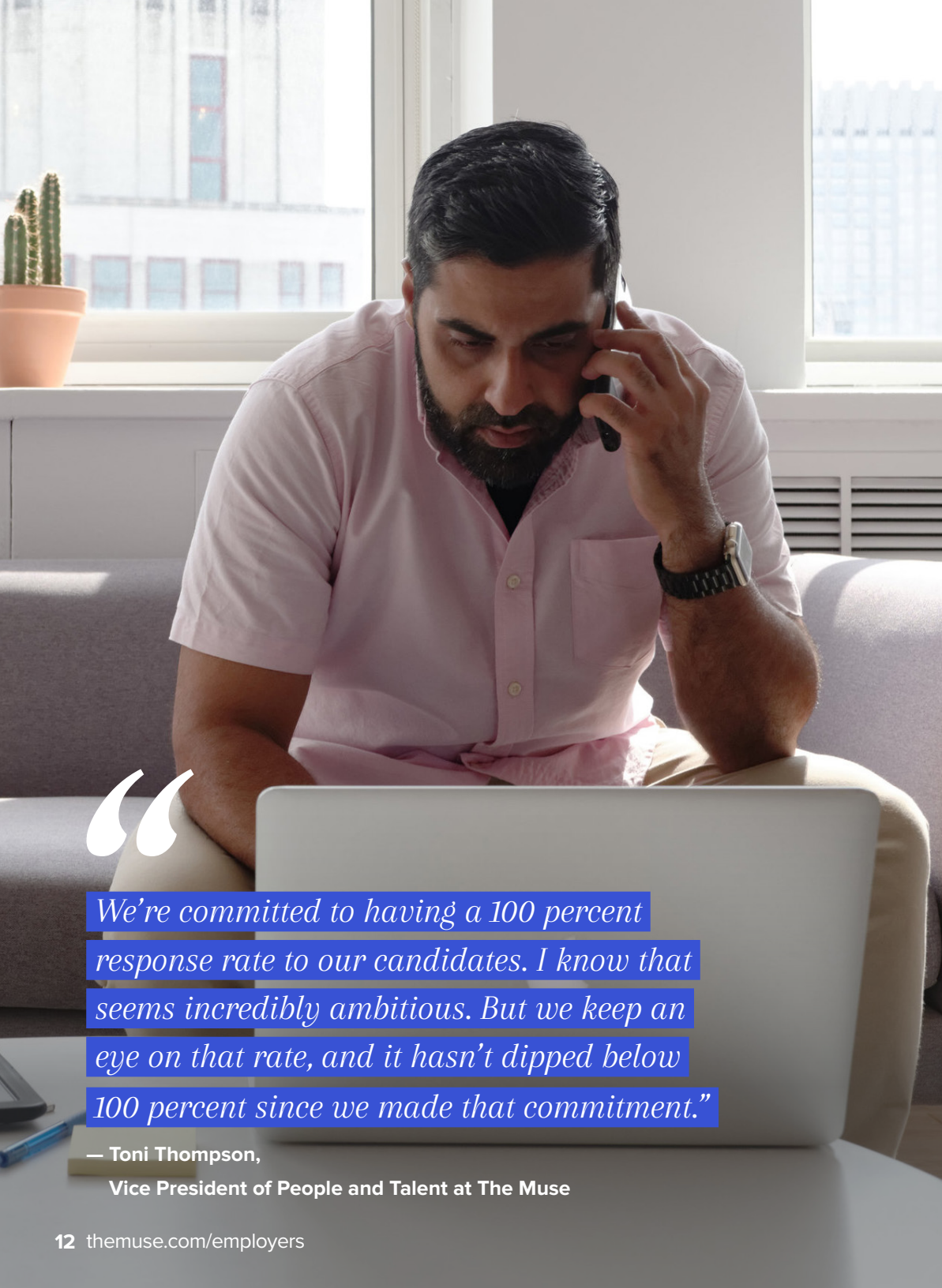just give them the rejection and wish them good luck.**

"Delivering the bad news is actually an opportunity
for engagement and bringing them closer to your
brand," she adds. "Give them some resources they can
use, like a video with interviewing tips. Give them the
opportunity to subscribe to a newsletter or a Facebook
community so they can keep in contact and get
updates when new positions open up."

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> — **Lisa Cervenka,**
> **Employer Brand Evangelist at The Muse**

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Hold Yourself Accountable

Creating a terrific candidate experience only works if you measure your performance and hold yourself accountable.

"You absolutely have to set benchmarks and evaluate your team's performance," Thompson recommends. "At The Muse, we use a quarterly candidate survey to gather feedback on how we performed. Candidates are honest with us about how we did, and we're honest with each other about own performance. For example, a number of candidates recently told us they weren't happy with our communication and feedback during the hiring process. To solve this, we've made it a priority to engage and delight our candidates at every step of the applicant journey."

Another metric Thompson's team tracks is response rate. "We're committed to having a 100 percent response rate to our candidates. I know that seems incredibly ambitious. But we keep an eye on that rate, and it hasn't dipped below 100 percent since we made that commitment."

While that may not be realistic for your organization, Thompson stresses that setting a benchmark here is critical. Determine what your current response rate is, set a goal for improving it, and track your progress rigorously.

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   Vice President of People and Talent at The Muse

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Your 2018 Candidate Experience Checklist

Now that you've read our tips for creating a powerful candidate experienceit's time to put a plan in action.

Use the checklist below to guide and measure your progress in the coming year.

- ✅ Define and refine your employer brand messaging.

- ✅ Ensure your messaging is clear across all channels—your careers site, social media, your email communication, videos, and more.

- ✅ Document your hiring process, and ensure recruiters and hiring managers thoroughly know and understand it.

- ✅ Develop content you can leverage at key moments throughout the candidate experience.

- ✅ Determine what content gets shared at which point—and who's responsible for sharing it.

- ✅ Personalize your communications, including outreach, scheduling, offers and even rejections.

- ✅ Develop empathetic and constructive rejection communications that keep candidates engaged in the future.

- ✅ Determine the metrics that matter most to your team, and set benchmarks to measure your performance.

- ✅ Make a plan to track your response rates regularly.

- ✅ Develop quarterly candidate experience surveys to find opportunities for improvement.

Follow the guidelines laid out here, and you'll be well on your way to creating a candidate experience applicants will love. You'll improve your quality of hire, your employer brand, employee morale and engagement—and maybe even your bottom line!

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Take The Next Step

Ready to take your candidate experience to the next level in 2018? There's no better way to get started than finding a trusted partner who can provide strategic guidance and expert advice along the way. If you're ready to create an amazing candidate experience, we'd love to talk.

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Website
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The Muse

The Muse strives to make work more human by being a trusted resource for millions of people as they seek career satisfaction—not just another job. Companies partner with The Muse as they look to attract and retain the best talent by telling an authentic and compelling employer story. Our mission is to create meaningful connections between companies and candidates to make the world of work—from the job search to career development—more personal.

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