

REFERRAL EMPLOYEE REFERRAL DIAGNOSTIC

TOOLKIT

- ✓ The Referral Diagnostic Questions
 - ✓ What Drives Referrals (It's Not Money)
 - ✓ The Referral Activation Framework
 - ✓ Referral Health Scorecard
-

Frameworks from

The Talent Brand by Jody Ordioni

If employees won't refer their friends, that's not a pipeline problem.

It's a brand problem.

The Truest Measure of Your Employer Brand.

"You don't refer people you care about to a place that oversells during recruitment."

The % of hires that come from employee referrals is the single most honest signal of employer brand health. Not Glassdoor. Not engagement scores. Referrals.

1 Why employees don't refer — It's almost never about the bonus.

2 What makes referrals happen naturally — Brand truth, trust, and fit confidence — not incentives.

3 What low referral rates actually mean — The diagnostic most talent teams miss entirely.

Want to understand what your referral rate is actually telling you?

We offer a free 30-minute Talent Brand Diagnostic. branding@brandemix.com

Signs Your Referral Program Has a Brand Problem

The program isn't broken. The brand is. These patterns are the tell.



Low referral rates despite high bonuses

If the money isn't moving people, the problem isn't the reward. It's pride. Employees won't put their name behind a promise they don't trust.



Referrals decline over time

New hires refer enthusiastically, then stop. That's the honeymoon period wearing off. The experience isn't living up to what they told their friends.



High referrals from new hires, low from tenured employees

The people who know the most about working here are the least likely to recommend it. That's your most important data point.



Referrals concentrated in certain teams or departments

Culture isn't consistent. Some managers create environments people want to join. Others don't. Your brand is only as strong as its weakest manager.



Employees won't refer for certain roles

They know those jobs are problematic. Dysfunction travels by reputation before it appears on Glassdoor.



Referred candidates are declining offers

Employees are overselling the reality to get the bonus. Your referral program is actively training people to misrepresent your brand.

If you checked two or more — your referral rate is a symptom, not the problem. This guide shows you how to diagnose and fix it.

What's Inside

01**The Referral Diagnostic***Current state, program mechanics, and the Friend Test***02****What Drives Referrals***Five factors that actually move employees to refer***03****Warning Signs Deep Dive***What each pattern tells you about your brand***04****The Activation Framework***Awareness, education, simplicity, transparency, recognition***05****Questions to Ask Now***When referrals are low, here's where to start***06****Referral Health Scorecard***Rate six factors — find your total — know where to fix***07****What to Do Next***Prioritize, fix, measure — and repeat quarterly*

The Referral Diagnostic

Audit your program honestly. Check every box you can confidently say 'yes' to.

CURRENT STATE

☐

Referral rate

What % of hires come from referrals? Industry avg: 30–40%.

☐

On track

☐

Needs work

☐

Unknown

☐

Never-referred employees

How many employees have NEVER made a single referral?

☐

On track

☐

Needs work

☐

Unknown

☐

Referral-to-hire rate

High conversion = employees know who actually fits.

☐

On track

☐

Needs work

☐

Unknown

PROGRAM MECHANICS

☐

Process awareness

Do employees know how to refer someone? Without looking it up?

☐

On track

☐

Needs work

☐

Unknown

☐

Ease of submission

Can they refer in under 5 minutes on any device?

☐

On track

☐

Needs work

☐

Unknown

☐

Feedback loop

Do referrers get status updates and a thank-you regardless of outcome?

☐

On track

☐

Needs work

☐

Unknown

The Friend Test

Ask these questions to 10 employees — anonymously. The answers tell you more than any engagement survey.

QUESTION	WHAT TO LISTEN FOR
☐ Would you recommend this company to a friend looking for a job? Why or why not?	<i>Hesitation before “yes” matters as much as the answer.</i>
☐ What would make you MORE likely to refer someone here?	<i>Process friction, visibility gaps, or brand trust issues.</i>
☐ What would make you LESS likely?	<i>Culture inconsistencies, unresolved problems, fear of social risk.</i>
☐ Have you referred someone in the past year? Why or why not?	<i>The “why not” is your most actionable data.</i>
☐ Can you name three open roles we’re hiring for right now?	<i>If they can’t, your internal communications are failing the program.</i>

What Drives Referrals

(It's Not Money)

For each driver, score your organization honestly — and note where the evidence is.

DRIVER · WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE	STATUS
☐ Pride Employees are proud to work here. <i>Test: Do they tell friends unprompted where they work?</i>	☐ Strong ☐ Partial ☐ Weak
☐ Fit Confidence They believe their friend would thrive here. <i>Test: Can employees articulate who WOULDN'T be a good fit?</i>	☐ Strong ☐ Partial ☐ Weak
☐ Trust They trust the hiring process will treat their friend well. <i>Test: Do referrals get timely responses and respectful treatment?</i>	☐ Strong ☐ Partial ☐ Weak
☐ Clarity They understand what roles are open and what you need. <i>Test: Can employees name 3 open roles without looking?</i>	☐ Strong ☐ Partial ☐ Weak
☐ Ease The process is simple and doesn't feel like extra work. <i>Test: Can they submit a referral in under 5 minutes?</i>	☐ Strong ☐ Partial ☐ Weak

What Low Referral Rates Are Actually Saying

Each pattern is a signal. Read them correctly before you change the program.

PATTERN



Low rates despite high bonuses

WHAT IT SIGNALS

Pride problem. The money isn't the issue — employees won't put their reputation on the line for a place they're not proud of.

PATTERN



Referrals decline over time

WHAT IT SIGNALS

Honeymoon period ends. The employee experience isn't matching the story they told their friends when they first started.

PATTERN



High new-hire referrals, low tenured

WHAT IT SIGNALS

Experience deteriorates. The people who know the most are the least likely to recommend. Your most critical data point.

PATTERN



Referrals concentrated in certain teams

WHAT IT SIGNALS

Culture is inconsistent. Some managers create places people want to join. Most don't. Brand can't outrun management.

PATTERN



Employees won't refer for specific roles

WHAT IT SIGNALS

Those jobs are known problems. Dysfunction travels by reputation long before Glassdoor catches it.

PATTERN



Referred candidates declining offers

WHAT IT SIGNALS

Employees are overselling to get the bonus. The referral program is actively training misrepresentation of your brand.

The Referral Activation Framework

Five levers. Fix the ones that are broken before you raise the bonus.

AWARENESS

Make it impossible to miss

- Monthly reminders with specific open roles — not “we’re hiring!”
- Celebrate successful referrals publicly by name
- Integrate into onboarding: “Who do you know who should be here?”

EDUCATION

Help them recruit effectively

- Provide shareable content: job posts written like they’d actually share them
- Give them the pitch — why their friends should consider this specifically
- Teach them who fits and, importantly, who doesn’t

SIMPLICITY

Remove every piece of friction

- One-click referral submission from any device
- No lengthy forms, no approval chains, no extra work
- If it takes longer than 5 minutes, fix the process before the program

Activation Framework — continued

TRANSPARENCY

Keep referrers informed at every step

- Automatic status updates at each stage of the hiring process
- Clear explanation if a referral isn't moved forward — no silence
- Thank you message every time, regardless of outcome

RECOGNITION

Appreciate the effort, not just the hire

- Public acknowledgment — not just a bonus check deposited quietly
- Celebrate referral hires when they start: introduce them to the team
- Track and share program impact: "32% of our team came from referrals"

One number to track

What % of hires came from referrals last quarter? If that number isn't rising, run this framework again. A healthy referral program doesn't need a hard sell — it needs a workplace worth recommending.

Industry benchmark: 30–40% of hires from referrals.

Are your employees referring their friends to work here?

If the answer is “sometimes,” “not really,” or “we don’t track it” — that’s the conversation we need to have. We run Referral Program Diagnostics for talent and employer brand teams that want to understand what’s actually driving (or blocking) referral behavior.

Let’s diagnose your referral program →

branding@brandemix.com · brandemix.com

Or continue to the Referral Health Scorecard →

Questions to Ask When Referrals Are Low

Before you change the program, answer these. The answers tell you which lever to pull.

01

Are employees actually proud to work here?

Pride is the foundation. Without it, no program mechanic will overcome the reluctance to refer.

02

Do they trust we'll treat their friends well?

Referrers put their personal reputation on the line. If they've seen candidates treated poorly, they won't risk it.

03

Is the employee experience what we promised?

If the experience doesn't match the pitch, employees know it — and they won't set up their friends for the same disappointment.

04

Are we making it too hard to refer?

Friction kills intent. A process that takes more than 5 minutes or requires approvals will suppress your numbers regardless of brand health.

05

Are we communicating what roles we're hiring for?

Employees can't refer for roles they don't know exist. Most referral programs fail here, not at motivation.

06

Do employees know what happens to their referrals?

Silence after a referral submission is the fastest way to ensure they never refer again. Close the loop every time.

Referral Health Scorecard

Rate each factor honestly — 1 (weak) to 5 (strong). Total out of 30.

CATEGORY	SCORE	BIGGEST GAP
Pride: Employees are proud to work here	1 2 3 4 5	
Confidence: They believe friends would thrive	1 2 3 4 5	
Trust: Referrals are treated well in hiring	1 2 3 4 5	
Clarity: Employees know open roles and needs	1 2 3 4 5	
Ease: Process is simple and fast	1 2 3 4 5	
Communication: Referrers get updates and thanks	1 2 3 4 5	

TOTAL SCORE

/ 30

25–30

Strong referral culture

18–24

Opportunity for improvement

Below 18

Likely a brand/experience issue

What to Do Next

Referral programs don't fail for lack of budget. They fail for lack of diagnosis.

1

Run the Friend Test

Ask 10 employees the four diagnostic questions this week — anonymously. You'll know within a day whether this is a brand issue or a process issue.

Who owns this:

2

Fix the highest-friction point first

Is it awareness? Ease? Communication? Pick one lever from the Activation Framework and own it completely before moving to the next.

Highest friction:

3

Address the underlying brand issue

If pride is low, fix the experience — not the incentive. Internal brand audits, manager enablement, onboarding redesign. Program mechanics can't patch a culture problem.

Core issue:

4

Set a referral rate target and track it

Industry benchmark is 30–40% of hires from referrals. Set a 90-day target, track weekly, and review what's moving.

Target:

5

Run the scorecard quarterly

Referral health is a leading indicator of employer brand health. A quarterly re-score is the fastest signal you have that something is shifting.

Next review date:

BELOW 18

If your scorecard came in below 18, your referral rate isn't a pipeline problem. Your employer brand is making promises your employees don't trust.

They know the truth. They're protecting the people they care about.

This is diagnosable. And fixable.

We run Referral Program Diagnostics that identify whether you have a brand issue, a process issue, or both — and give you a prioritized roadmap for closing the gap.

Book a free 30-min diagnostic →

branding@brandemix.com · brandemix.com

Here's how we help.

We've spent 20+ years helping organizations build employer brands that employees are proud to recommend — from the outside in and the inside out.

EVP Development

We research what's genuinely true about your organization — through employee interviews, focus groups, and competitive analysis — and build an EVP that's specific, defensible, and real.

Delivered 200+ EVPs across industries

Employer Brand Strategy

Once your EVP is validated, we build the brand architecture and messaging system that lets it show up everywhere — from job posts to onboarding to all-hands meetings.

From strategy through activation

Referral Program Diagnostics

We audit your referral rate, program mechanics, and underlying brand health — then give you a clear roadmap that addresses root causes, not just process fixes.

Where referrals prove the brand

Your referral rate is your brand report card. Let's read it together.

A 30-minute conversation. We'll look at your numbers, tell you what they mean, and talk through what to do first.

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