Recruiting and Retaining the "Right" Origination Talent

In today's evolving equipment finance market, recruiting and retaining the right origination talent requires more than production volume. Success depends on quality, efficiency, alignment, and a mutual commitment by employers and originators to ensure the relationship is the right fit for both.

By Scott Wheeler, CLFP



Recruiting and retaining the *right origination talent* is essential for any commercial equipment finance and leasing organization that expects to outperform its competitors. Market leaders are defined by the strength and efficiency of their teams — origination, credit, operations, and portfolio management working in alignment.



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Average producers who simply "find and submit" opportunities are no longer sufficient. Inefficient approval and funding ratios drain organizational resources, slow growth, and weaken competitive positioning. Highperforming originators consistently achieve a **90% approval ratio** and a **90% closing ratio** because they know precisely which transactions can be approved and funded. They do not waste time chasing relationships or deals that will never close.

As the late Larry S. often said, *"Any originator can find a deal. Real talent lies in identifying transactions that will be approved, funded and collected in a timely manner."* That is the standard organizations must recruit for, and the standard they must retain. Mel Kleiman reinforced this truth when he warned that too many managers spend their time hiring *turkeys who will never fly* instead of *eagles who will soar*.

The commercial equipment finance and leasing industry has changed dramatically in recent years and continues to evolve at a rapid pace. Production levels once considered strong can now be viewed as subpar. An originator may boast a 30% increase in production, yet the number of funded transactions may be significantly lower because the increase often reflects higher equipment costs rather than improved origination performance. In today's market, organizations must look beyond volume and focus on the **quality, efficiency, and fundability** of every transaction.

Managers, executives, and owners frequently ask where they can find top producers and how they can attract soaring eagles rather than grounded turkeys. The answer begins with recognizing that recruitment and employment is a **two-way street**. Misalignment benefits no one. The rapid changes of the past few years have left many professionals in roles that no longer fit. Not because the companies are poor organizations or the individuals are poor employees, but because the environment has shifted. When the market changes, both employers and employees must be willing to make the appropriate adjustments.

Recruiting Strategies

Finding toptier originators requires more than posting job descriptions and hoping the right candidates appear. Organizations must adopt proactive recruiting strategies that target professionals with proven track records of continuous development of fundable production. This begins with clearly defining the characteristics of highperforming originators: true hunters capable of creating new relationships, seasoned professionals in targeted industries, and individuals fully aligned with the company's credit window.

Effective recruiting also requires building a strong industry presence. Companies must consistently communicate their value proposition: a supportive credit culture, efficient operations, competitive programs, and a reputation for closing transactions quickly. Top originators gravitate toward organizations where they can win. Leaders should leverage industry associations, targeted networking, referral pipelines, and direct outreach to identify *eagles* rather than *turkeys*. Recruitment must be continuous, intentional and disciplined; not reactive.

The interviewing process should be structured around **candidate engagement**. Top producers expect to meet multiple individuals within the organization and want to understand the company's current vision and strategy. Highperforming originators ask tough questions of their prospects, and they should be asking tough questions of potential employers as well. Below are examples of key questions both sides should be asking during the recruiting process.

Favorite Employer Questions for Potential Originators

- **Tell me about the newest relationships you've developed over the past six months or year.** If an employer wants a hunter, they must evaluate a candidate's ability to continually hunt. If a candidate has not developed new relationships for their current employer, they are unlikely to hunt effectively for a new employer.

- **How have your daily activities changed over the past three years?** The industry has shifted dramatically. If an originator is still using tactics from ten years ago, that is a problem.

- **Give me examples of how you support your credit and operations teams to improve efficiency and better serve vendors and end users.** Top producers are team players who strengthen internal processes and enhance overall performance.

Favorite Originator Questions for Potential Employers

- **Ask several individuals — sales leaders, originators, credit managers, and executives — the same question: "What is the profile of the perfect transaction or relationship for the company?"** Consistency is a positive sign. Divergent answers indicate misalignment and require deeper exploration.

- **Tell me how your compensation package aligns with the company's short and longterm strategy.** With rapid industry changes, too many compensation plans reflect outdated priorities. Plans focused solely on more fundings rather than quality assets are shortsighted. The right compensation structure emphasizes longterm quality and stability for the originator.

- **Tell me about the company's technology objectives and what actions are underway to stay ahead of the market.** How will the company use AI in the next one, three and five years? Top originators want to know whether the organization is evolving with the industry.

Retention Strategies

Recruiting the right originators is only half the battle; retaining them is equally critical. High performers stay where they feel valued, supported, and empowered to grow. Organizations must create an environment where originators can thrive with streamlined processes, responsive credit teams, transparent communication, and compensation structures that reward **quality** production rather than inflated volume.

Retention also depends on professional alignment. As the industry evolves, some originators inevitably find themselves out of sync with their company's credit appetite, target markets, or operational structure. Effective leaders recognize these shifts early and address them directly. Sometimes the solution is additional training, a refined market focus, or upgraded tools. In many cases, the evolution of a company's sales team creates a situation where a talented originator is suddenly in the wrong role. Rather than losing a top producer, reassignment into a betteraligned position can benefit both the individual and the organization — everyone wins. Other times, both the company and the originator benefit from parting ways. Retention is not about keeping everyone; it is about keeping the right people. Even excellent talent can find itself misplaced within an evolving operation.

Top originators remain with their employers for the same reasons they always have. They want to understand the company's objectives, strategies, and longterm vision. They expect transparency, challenges and opportunities shared openly, without surprises. They deserve respect, clarity, and empowerment to fulfill the company's goals. The employer's responsibility is to provide the tools, resources, and investments required to succeed in a rapidly changing market. The originator's responsibility is to fully understand the company's capabilities and to focus on transactions and relationships that align with those current capabilities.

In 2026 and for the foreseeable future, maintaining fluid communication will require additional concerted effort from both employer and employee. Top originators are the eyes and ears of the organization. The competitive intelligence they gather daily must be shared with professionalism and calmness. Conversely, employers should communicate competitive insights related to technology, funding options, portfolio performance, and operational advancements. The commercial equipment finance and leasing industry is a team sport, and retaining top talent requires every stakeholder to pull together.

Organizations that excel at both recruiting and retaining top originators build teams capable of delivering fundable, high-quality transactions year after year. Those are the teams that soar.

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