

How to Get Your Money's Worth From the Recruiting Fees You Pay?

Critical job openings often occur when you least expect them. For example, the Vice President of your division resigns to accept another position or gets promoted to corporate headquarters. Lean and mean since the last downsizing, your department has no acceptable stand-ins waiting in the wings. You need a new division head, and you need him or her now.

Like any good executive, you scour the company first, but other divisions are as short of qualified people as your own. You briefly consider advertising, but you've been down that barren path before. There's little choice but to seek professional help.

Day in and day out, Corporate India turns to search firms to find and recruit key talent for hard-to-fill positions. Unless casually prospecting for any good people you happen to find, companies begin the search with a genuine sense of urgency, and search consultants respond with equal urgency. What happens next, however, depends on the way in which the parties choose to work together or ignore each other.

Selecting a Search Consultant

Companies vary widely in their approaches to selecting recruiters.

A few will feed the basic specs to anyone who calls, in the belief that this will create competitive pressure, reduce recruiters' fees and maximize resume yield. What such companies actually receive is low-level attention, cut-rate service and left-over candidates.

Wiser companies realize that selection of the right search firm is vital to ending up with the right candidates. Firms in turn consist of individual recruiters, and you should engage the one or ones whom you trust enough to serve as the company's representative and business partner.

Unless you've worked with a recruiter in the past, it's fair to ask such questions as: What is the size, age and scope of your organization? In what kinds of industries and positions do you specialize? Describe how you will work with me/my company. Will you do custom recruiting, as opposed to simply searching your database files?

Like hiring a doctor, lawyer, accountant or any other professional, satisfy yourself you've made the best decision in terms of skills, experience, personal attention and rapport.

Maximizing Search Results

In return, the good recruiter will have a number of questions for you that are designed to determine the true urgency of the search, get beneath the surface of the position description, confirm the recruiter's access to all those involved in the hiring process and obtain the company's agreement to pay customary compensation for full recruiting services.

There are three dimensions to any executive-level position the skills and experience required to perform the work, the tasks and projects that the incumbent will be required to manage and the corporate culture in which the position exists. Like peeling an onion, uncovering each layer of information helps the recruiter find a closer match.

Consider, for instance, the company that says it wants a product manager with an MBA and eight or more years of experience in packaged goods. This is simply the first layer of information, and there are thousands of product managers who would fit this description.

The professional search consultant, however, will probe for more information. What exactly will the new employee be expected to do? Learning that this specific manager will assume responsibility for the national introduction of a major snack food, the recruiter can begin zeroing in on those product managers who have launched, or help launch, a food product in the past.

Finally, unless the consultant has previously worked with your company, he or she will want to understand the work environment, or culture, that may help one candidate flourish while causing another to fail. Good recruiters don't present Lone Rangers to companies with rigid hierarchies, or button-down executives to work in loosely organized creative environments.

Appreciate the search consultant who insists on taking your time to answer such questions. Scorn the one who's ready to roll the moment he learns you need an MBA.

How Good Recruiters Work

A professional search consultant, like an attorney or accountant, will want to stay in touch with you frequently throughout the course of an assignment advising you of progress, perhaps obtaining additional information about the company or position, presenting high-potential candidates, arranging interview dates, etc. Since the recruiter is working on your behalf, it is important that you take phone calls or return them as soon as possible.

The search consultant also may want access to any others who are directly involved in the hiring decision. This is especially likely if you are not the direct supervisor of the person to be hired. The direct supervisor often knows most about what counts in filling the position and is thus a vital resource in the recruiting process.

As candidates are identified, the recruiter may want to provide an oral or written presentation of why they fit all three dimensions of the position opening. A company that responds by saying – Just send us the resumes – does the candidates, the recruiter and itself a disservice. Resumes rarely demonstrate why a person is right for a specific job, are usually written to cover the waterfront of potential job openings and end up being evaluated on bases that have little to do with the real requirements of the position.

In a perfect world, the first candidate to be presented to a prospective employer would turn out to be the perfect match. It sometimes happens, however, that some subtle requirement of the position was not fully explained or understood when the search began. In other situations, job requirements may actually change as the search progresses (e.g., the company decides it wants someone more senior than originally specified).

Accordingly, it is important to provide a recruiter the fullest possible feedback on why this or that candidate failed to make the grade. As a search progresses to the final cut of highly qualified candidates, a professional recruiter can be of enormous assistance in helping the company structure its interviewing process. Recruiters interview people for a living and can offer many helpful suggestions.

Recruiters also convince busy, successful people that your opportunity merits sufficient consideration for them to take the time away from work to meet with you. Candidates, not to mention their recruiter, will become highly skeptical if interview dates are repeatedly rescheduled or placed on hold. Present a positive first impression of your company by setting, and keeping, a prompt interview date.

Once you select the ideal candidate, a truly effective search consultant will help you construct an offer that is attractive to company and candidate alike and will want to extend the offer for you. Use of a third-party negotiator can help surface and resolve any last-minute issues or concerns and can prevent small differences in salary or benefit expectations from becoming unnecessary deal killers.

Any search firm worth its salt wants to do the best possible job for you, not only to make a placement but also to earn your repeat business over time. So don't be surprised if your recruiter, once the search is completed, asks for just a few more minutes of your time to obtain your candid assessment of the firm's performance and how you might be better served in the future.

