



Working with Job Search Consultants and Recruiters

LISA L. WALKER *
KORN/FERRY INTERNATIONAL

Search firms and executive recruiters can be powerful allies in a competitive employment environment. This article puts their role in context and provides guidelines on how to work effectively with them.

Professionals often turn to executive recruiters and job search consultants when looking for employment.

Understanding how recruiters work is helpful if you want to establish relationships that will lead to a new position.

The relationship between recruiters and job candidates

First, it is important to remember that recruiters work for client companies — *i.e.*, the hiring organizations — and not for the job candidates *per se*.

In the current economic downturn, the need for companies to attract first-rate engineering talent remains as critical as ever. At the management level, companies seek leaders with proven records of success and experience managing companies and projects through challenging situations. Against this backdrop, if you are seeking to connect with a recruiter for the first time, you will stand the best chance if your background and skills match an opportunity that he or she is actively working on.

The do's and don'ts of contacting a recruiter

Although recruiters are empathetic and eager to help professionals succeed, it is impossible for them to personally interact with all job candidates, given the large number of people vying for their attention. That said, there are

ways to increase the chances of getting noticed and establishing a relationship with a recruiter.

Perhaps the most effective way to be introduced to a job recruiter is through a colleague — such as a trusted client or well-known industry contact — who has already established a productive relationship or a good reputation with the recruitment firm. AIChE, trade associations, and university alumni organizations can be valuable networks for developing such connections.

Never underestimate the power of your professional network, and leverage it to be put in touch with a recruiter specializing in your industry sector, function, or geographic location. Even then, it is likely that your initial meeting will be via phone or e-mail, rather than in person.

Many recruiters prefer that you introduce yourself by e-mail, rather than by telephone “cold-calling,” as it provides a quick impression of you and allows the recruiter to circulate your credentials among colleagues and enter your information into a database. The recruiter will look for what is uniquely differentiating in your resumé, including qualitative information such as the jobs you have held, organizations for which you have worked, management experience that you may have acquired, and accomplishments or profits for which you may have been accountable.

Recruiting firms' information-management capabilities have become very sophisticated, enabling them to pin-

point the most appropriate talent for a given role. If your background aligns with an open position, you will likely be contacted for a phone discussion (although this contact may be made by an associate on the recruiter's team).

Should you not hear directly from the person you originally contacted, this does not mean that you do not have access to the recruiter. The research and support staff at a search firm is a collaborative team, and initial impressions of you and your qualifications will be taken into account. (As one of my colleagues notes, "If you make a good impression, people will find you.")

An alternative to sending your resumé directly to an individual is to submit it to the firm's database through its website. The benefits of this include the ability to update your resumé online, as well as to show your interest and initiative to a broad audience.

Approaching a recruiter

When contacting a recruiter, send an e-mail with an updated resumé, accompanied by a brief overview of your career path: title, geography, compensation and the types of opportunities you are interested in. Avoid "spamming" recruiters with multiple unsolicited e-mails each week or calling them several times in a day, as these actions may backfire.

Be transparent without being overly self-promotional during any phone or in-person meeting. Do not make claims that will not stand up to rigorous background and reference checking; the recruiter's duty to the client necessitates a reasonably thorough investigation of potential employees, and anything that is fabricated or exaggerated will be discovered.

Have a clear vision of what you want and a self-awareness of what you have to offer. Be careful not to view recruiters as career counselors. Recruiters may have hundreds of assignments open at any given time, and although they can give you a snapshot of what is happening in the market at large, they cannot necessarily help you focus your job search if you lack clarity.

Strategically target a single recruiter within a job search firm. This individual will facilitate connections to others who might be pertinent to you. Contacting multiple people within a search firm can cause confusion.

Assess opportunities offered by recruiters realistically. Do not feign interest in a job that you are not intending to follow through on simply to get face-time with a recruiter. It will waste time and not position you as a serious candidate.

What to expect

1. Interview preparation advice. The recruiter will normally provide quite specific guidance before an interview, to enable you to be on the same page with the hiring manager as soon as your meeting begins.

Have a clear vision of what you want and a self-awareness of what you have to offer. Do not expect recruiters to act as career counselors.

2. Collaboration on negotiations. The role of the search firm during the negotiation process will be very hands-on, to make sure that both sides are fairly represented. The recruiter helps to bridge the gap between the job candidate and the hiring organization, acting as an impartial sounding board for the candidate regarding what compensation he or she can reasonably ask for, and brokering the deal through to completion.

3. Tracking of progress, especially during the first 90 days. After being placed in a position, the new hire will likely have an ongoing relationship with the recruiter, who will check in to see how things are going and provide support if required to help ensure that the transition is successful.

Stand out by sharing contacts and market knowledge

Your willingness to refer other job candidates to help a recruiter fill a position can be a powerful way of setting yourself apart. Doing so proves that you know what is happening behind the scenes in your industry and demonstrates your ability to share insights and ideas discretely and appropriately. By being a productive and reliable resource, you will have established trust and respect with the recruiter — and a basis for reconnecting periodically when you have information that could be meaningful to the recruiter's (or your own) work. If you have had phone or in-person contact with a recruiter, ask if you can follow up in a few months to keep the communication flowing and your options open.

A search firm can be very helpful to you as you seek new opportunities and as you build your career support team. Understanding roles and responsibilities will help you maximize the benefits of your relationship with a recruiter.

CEP

LISA L. WALKER is a senior client partner at Korn/Ferry International (Chicago, IL; Phone: (312) 526-0580; E-mail: lisa.walker@kornferry.com), where she leads the firm's sustainability and agribusiness practices. With two decades of experience in executive search and senior roles within the industrial marketplace, she leads searches for clients seeking marketing, strategy, business development, technology, and operations expertise. Prior to entering executive search, she was chief marketing officer with BP PLC, Air BP, managing all marketing aspects of the international jet fuel business. She also worked with Amoco Corp. as director of strategic planning and director of marketing strategy. An AIChE member, Walker earned a BS in chemical engineering from Cornell Univ. and an MBA in finance and economics from the Univ. of Chicago.