

Bloodhound? Trial Lawyer? Psychologist? Casanova?

Yes. These are the Hallmarks of a successful Recruiter and the current War for Talent dictates that you will engage their services sometime this year. Selecting an executive search firm is challenging. No formula exists to make the decision obvious. Name on the door, size of organization, number of offices and automated retrieval systems bear no relation to a firm's ability to effectively represent your interests. The reason is simple – executive search is a personal service where success is based upon the *individual* search consultant's ability to manage human interaction.

Here's how to hire the type of Recruiter you need and get what you pay for.

Understand from the outset that the quality of a Search effects not only the quality of the person that you hire but the potential outcome of the Hire, so any Recruiter's first obligation is to understand your business, your culture and the position to be filled. They need to have a defined methodology in place to gather, process, and package your opportunity. They must write out your requirements for your review.

Make sure you meet and are comfortable with, the specific Recruiter assigned to the project. Some of the largest executive search firms have "contact" people or sales people who land the account and hand it over to someone else to complete, avoid these types of firms' unless you have a huge budget, for the following reasons:

- a junior may not understand your business or its' potential,
- they may not be capable of calling on and assessing senior people, let alone repackaging and re-approaching someone who has already said no,

A thorough needs assessment should include an effort to understand your company, your leadership style, your culture and priorities. Questions like "what kind of people are most/least successful in this company?" are just the start. At a minimum Recruiters need to ask why someone is being hired, what they are expected to achieve, and what kind of person is presumed to be the best fit. For most Recruiters, this is standard fair and should take a few hours.

Hire a Recruiter who is passionate about your company by judging:

- Ability to comprehend the role, and help define/refine the job and essential candidate characteristics;
- Experience in recruiting at similar levels, and overall experience in search,;
- Experience in the market you want to tap, be it functional or geographical,
- What companies are off limits to the search firm? Does their off limits list constrict the market too much, such that your needs are not able to be met;
- Method of search compensation – retained or contingency. This defines the service you receive. A retained Recruiter will provide a full service; a contingency Recruiter will try to make a "sale" as fast as possible. The question here is how much service do you want and need?;
- Who is going to do the work on the search? What's their experience? If more than one person, how are the responsibilities allocated? Current work load. Anything over five or six current assignments means that your's won't get the time and attention it deserves;
- Ask about their completion percentage. Be cautious of a record of less than 90%. However, be doubly cautious if they indicate that they have never experienced a failed search assignment;
- Ask them which assignments failed and why;

Beware of Recruiters who ask for an assignment before understanding it. Good Recruiters, for various reasons, are prepared to reject an assignment after fully understanding it. During the process, evaluate the Recruiter's selling skills as well as their listening skills. Ultimately, you are hiring a salesman to identify and recruit the best prospects. The primary focus of a professional salesperson is the client's best interests – first, last and always! The amateur is more concerned about fees - first, last and always!

Integrity is a Recruiter's Touchstone. If candidates are misled they may expect more from the position than exists. What's the likelihood of a long-term hire? If the Recruiter coaches candidates or rewrites resumes do you really know who you are hiring?

What references can the Recruiter provide? Talk to those people and determine:

- Was the project completed?
- Did they understand the culture of the organization and develop candidates that were appropriate?
- Thoroughness? Responsiveness? Flexibility? Communications?
- How detailed and informative was the reference data on candidates?
- How objective was the search consultant? Did he/she try to "sell" one particular candidate?

Candidates often say NO when first contacted by a Recruiter make certain yours has the drive to keep working the project to a successful conclusion.

This is the first of a twelve part series by David Perry, Managing Partner of Perry-Martel International, Inc. an international executive search firm. He can be reached via e-mail at: dperry@perrymartel.com