

Checklist for Working with Recruiters

by R. Anne Hull

In today's job market, it may be useful to work with someone who can help you to more readily navigate the challenges of finding the right job. Although most people find their best opportunities through our own contacts, having an agent who works to secure the right position for you can be another component in your job search strategy.

A recruiter is someone who acts as your agent, similar to a real estate agent when you buy or sell your home. They can help you reach companies you may not be able to reach on your own. Before beginning to work with a recruiter, it is important to recognize that there are three key types of recruiters. Understanding which type of recruiter you are working with can help you to best navigate your options and, hopefully, better position you to get the job best suited for you.

Contingency recruiters get paid by the employer if they present a candidate the company decides to hire. Generally, if you're in the \$25-\$75K salary range, you'll work with contingency recruiters. The contingency recruiter often finds opportunities you may have missed or positions which are not advertised. Yet, when a contingency recruiter presents you, they become a middleman in the hiring process, adding thousands of dollars to your new employer's hiring process. This could reduce your ability to negotiate salary or, in some cases, price you out of contention.

Retained recruiters are hired by the employer to find the desired candidate, generally for higher-level positions (\$75-200+K). Since the employer has already committed to pay the recruiter's fee, working with a retained recruiter will not make you "more expensive" to an employer. Retained recruiters find you through your network referrals or your current employer. They are being paid to fill a very high position and work on a very short list.

And then there are **employer recruiters**, paid staff, often in the HR department of the organization. You do not contract with these individuals. They are constantly sourcing and looking for potential candidates to fill current and future openings within their organization. Again, they find you through your networks. They are the first screening level for the hiring manager, so treat them with utmost professional respect. Remember, recruiters do talk to each other, so even if you are not interested in their organization or position, act with 100% professionalism.

Whichever type of recruiter best fits your job search needs, remember to choose wisely. Successful athletes and actors don't tend to choose the first agent that comes along. Instead, they outline who is responsible for what, timelines, and fees. Before you send them your resume, manage your expectations and the recruiter's with a contract, in writing. Below are some aspects to explore for a good relationship.

Finding a Recruiter

Very few of us would buy the first car we saw. It's incredible how we don't apply the same level of shopper savvy to our professional careers.

- The best way to get a recruiting firm's attention is to have a colleague suggest your name.
 - Ask people whom you respect, are in the same industry or in your profession, who they recommend.
 - Contact your professional associations.
 - Call the types of organization you are interested in working with and ask what recruiters they use. But if you are going to do that, I'd skip the recruiter and represent yourself to the hiring manager.
- Find out which firms specialize in your industry and job level.
 - Again, ask people whom you respect, are in the same industry or in your profession who they recommend.
 - Your professional associations can prove invaluable in putting you in touch with the recruiters that work heavily in your industry.
 - *The Directory of Executive Recruiters*, Kennedy Information, Inc. is available online and at libraries. Look for the latest edition.
- How many should you work with?
 - Keep the number low – two or three in different industries or areas so they don't trip over each other. Employers get suspicious if more than one recruiter presents you as a candidate. Also, recruiters are less like to heavily market you if they know you have too many irons in the fire.

Help Them Help You

Your recruiter is only as good as the information you give them to work with about you and your skill sets. Be ready to talk with them about both what opportunities you are looking for and what you have to offer a potential employer.

- Your recruiter will need to know the types of organizations and industries you want to consider and why.
- Tell the recruiter what type of organizations you are definitely not interested in and, most importantly, why not.
- Be candid and professional. The recruiter needs to know the salary range you want to see if you are in their target range. Be prepared to back up your expected salary with facts on your market value as well as your current salary.
- "What type of work are you looking for?" is a common question recruiters ask. Describe the level, not just the title. A VP in banking is very different from a VP at a foundation. Be forward thinking about what you want to do, not just what you can do.

- To represent you, they need to thoroughly understand what you can offer the employer. You'll need to help them answer the question, "Why should I hire this person?" Without reading your resume, offer examples of your expertise and experience (both paid and volunteer) that illustrate your successes and interests. Together you can translate your experience and talents into an attractive package for the employer.
- Clearly communicate with the contingency recruiter about which connections you have made on your own, so that you won't have the extra fee attached to you unnecessarily.

Be Sure It Is a Good Fit

You want the recruiter to both clearly understand what you want in your next job and to represent you in the best possible way. A good recruiter won't just ask for your resume. Instead the recruiter will take the time to better understand what she is trying to market – you! As part of this process, the recruiter will likely ask you tough, detailed questions that will reveal whether you fit the company, the manager, the job and the technology. Pay attention to the questions the recruiter asks. These questions reveal the style and approach of the recruiter and can often give you clues about a potential employer.

Create a warm, professional conversation as they interview you. A two-way conversation will help you determine if this is the best recruiter for you. Here are some things to find out:

- How many years has the recruiter/the recruiting firm been in the business? Identify the successful placement rate or ratios of each.
- What areas does the recruiter specialize in? Who are the recruiter's client companies?
- What specific positions does the recruiter usually recruit for?
- How will the recruiter market you? How aggressively will they market you? Ask for a specific plan with time estimates so you don't worry if things seem to be moving too slowly.
- Will he send every employer in town your resume? Although this may initially sound like a good way to gain visibility, it may boomerang on you. It is both your and the recruiter's reputation on the line.
- Will the recruiter be representing other candidates for the same position? (Will you be competing against others from the same recruiter?)
- Ask, "What would your candidates say about you as a recruiter?" and "What would your clients say?"
- Just as employers ask for your references, will the recruiter give you references from both candidates they've represented as well as employers?

- How knowledgeable is your recruiter about the organization, the hiring manager, and actual job being filled? You need to know so much more than just job title and salary.
- Does the recruiter demonstrate good business etiquette? This includes phone manners, responding to messages? Does the recruiter keep their word?
- How will your resume be handled? Will it be submitted as is? Will it be rewritten or tweaked before being sent to an employer? It is dangerous to walk into an interview with a different copy of your resume that the employer has. Also, remember that it is you, not the recruiter, who is responsible for the integrity and honesty of your resume.

Understand the Process

Different recruiters have different processes they follow with their candidates. Often, candidates expect a recruiter to behave exactly like one they worked with years ago. To avoid missteps and failed expectations, ask some key recruiting process questions.

- Does she meet candidates or does she just do phone calls?
- Will she contact you before she represents you to a potential employer?
- At what point should you expect to meet with the hiring official?
- Will she help you prepare and rehearse for the interview, in person or over the phone? It is most helpful to prepare and rehearse in person because the recruiter can give you tips on the non-verbal aspects, which highly influence the hiring manager.

Care and Feeding of the Relationship

- If you apply directly to an organization for a position, be sure the recruiter isn't also trying to fill the same job. If an employer finds you've applied for a job, and the recruiter presents you as a candidate – oops! They will owe the recruiter a search fee. If the employer is not fond of the recruiter, they may toss you both out.
- Once you've given a recruiter a go-ahead to represent you, stay in touch to see what is being done to market you. Agree on frequency to check in so you don't become annoying or get forgotten.
- Remember, the recruiter is working for the employer, not you, the candidate. The employer is paying the fee, so you need to remain as professional and attractive as possible for the recruiter to represent you.

In Your First Week on the New Job

Just because you receive an offer letter, your relationship with the recruiter has not come to a close.

- Notify everyone involved in your search that you're successfully started the new position. Express your gratitude for their support and help. Be sure to give them a reason to keep you on their radar to continue your overall career development as well as to return the support. You don't want them to take you off their list.
- Revise your resume to include your present job description and send it, along with an updated "wish list," to your favorite recruiter(s).
- When you start a new job, let them know so that can update their records and keep an eye out for future opportunities.
- Manage your reputation with all recruiters. They remember you for longer than you may think they do.

One final tip, try not to refer to your recruiter as a headhunter. Although you'll see lots of groups by that name, they don't tend to like that term too much.