

CareerSmart Advisor™

Strategies & Solutions for Your Career Success

A Note From Dave

Finding just the right people to join your team has always been an ambitious task, but it's even more challenging today as the war for talent wages on. Coupled with a rough economy in which talented individuals are reluctant to jump ship for the uncharted waters of a new organization, it's becoming a larger problem to attract the best and brightest to your firm.



Executive recruiters and corporate HR folks alike don't have the vast pool of potential candidates that they typically tap into. Passive candidates are staying put.

More inspired recruiting efforts are now required to grab the attention of these talented individuals. According to a recent article on BusinessWeek.com entitled *Tempt Talent with Creative Recruiting*, that's apparently what recruiters and hiring managers are doing.

For instance, the article tells the story about Red 5 Studios, a video game startup company that struggled to find good candidates. Red 5 recognized that it needed a new approach. It identified 100 of its ideal candidates, learned about them through social networks and personal blogs, and took that information to create a personalized iPod that the company sent to each individual. The iPod, which also contained a recorded message from the company's CEO, was well-received and led to several hires and connected the firm with many additional potential hires.

In any job market, it's vital for individuals to do all they can to stand out from the competition in order to gain attention from recruiters and hiring managers. In today's environment, it's just as important — and necessary — for the hiring organizations to adopt the same approach.

Sincerely,



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How to Become a Recruiter's Ultimate Dream Candidate

By Marji McClure

The main goal of any job seeker is to be the candidate of choice for an employer; becoming the individual an organization selects for a position. Yet, for many, that means first becoming a preferred candidate of an executive recruiter. But becoming top-of-mind for recruiters, especially when they typically deal with an incredible number of executives on a regular basis, is certainly a huge challenge. There remain many mysteries about how to best communicate with recruiters and yield a satisfying (and not frustrating) experience for all involved.

We asked several recruiters what they expect from candidates; how they want the executive-recruiter relationship to really work and make it beneficial for everyone. They offered insights into every aspect of that relationship, from the initial communication to follow-up and finally, presentation to a client company. Knowing their expectations should undoubtedly help you manage yours when interacting with recruiters.

The Initial Contact

How a candidate makes first contact with a recruiter is crucial since it sets the tone for any relationship that a recruiter will have with that individual. Oftentimes, executives are unsure how they should make that initial contact. A telephone call or an email are typically both acceptable and effective, recruiters agree. Yet, they also concur that phone calls lend a more personal touch.

To make that relationship even more personal, try to uncover how a particular recruiter prefers to communicate before you even place that phone call or hit "send" on the email. "Each search consultant will have a preference, and you should make an effort to identify the preferred method," says ExecuNet member Stephen Prichard, a human capital consultant and executive coach.

Even better, say some recruiters, is to cover your bases and use a variety of communication methods — as well as referrals — to make that initial contact. "If the recruiter isn't available [by phone], the executive should leave a voicemail self-introduction and indicate that he or she will follow-up with an email to potentially schedule a call," says

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David Nosal, CEO of San Francisco-based Nosal Partners LLC, an executive search and development firm. “Whether by telephone or email, the executive would ideally reference a third party who can help bridge the relationship.”

When deciding which to work with, do your research and identify recruiters who specialize in your industry and functional area. Don’t waste time reaching out to recruiters who don’t have contacts in your area of interest and probably can’t help you. Start with one, don’t begin working with several different recruiters at the same time. “Start with an exclusive relationship and build out if that relationship is coming up short in building relationships for you,” says Krista Bradford, founder and principal of The Good Search, a Westport, Conn.-based search firm.

The Résumé

When preparing your résumé for a recruiter’s eyes, keep in mind that it needs to be concise, yet organized. It must illustrate that you are focused. “It needs to look like you have a plan or goal and that you’re not just looking for the first thing that comes along,” says Chad Spawr, a human resource professional and ExecuNet member.

The résumé should clearly outline your accomplishments and answer any questions that a recruiter could have about your background. “Make sure your résumé makes it clear what product or service you have experience with and who your primary customers are,” says Steve Kendall, president of Management Recruiters of Atlanta West Inc. in Lithia Springs, Ga. “You would be amazed how many people simply list a company name and expect everyone to know what that company does. Recruiters don’t have time to play guessing games.”

Kendall stresses the importance of including those accomplishments and making them stand out. “Be specific, whenever possible,” he says. “Saying you ‘increased sales’ isn’t impressive. Saying you ‘increased sales 42 percent in the last year’ is impressive.”

They Don’t Work FOR You, They Work WITH You

Perhaps one of the biggest misconceptions in the executive recruiting industry is that recruiters work for the candidates. The truth is, while recruiters want you, the candidate, to succeed, retained executive search consultants work for their client companies. They are screening you based on criteria for a position as outlined by the client company; and these third-party recruiters are paid for finding candidates the client wants to hire.

On the other hand, contingency recruiters don’t work exclusively for companies; but they are paid if a candidate they present is hired. Corporate recruiters (who typically work in the human resources department) are charged with finding talent for their organization’s needs.

“A search consultant’s mission is to fill an open position for an employer,” says ExecuNet member Stephen Prichard, a human capital consultant and executive coach. “This most often means giving the employer candidates who meet the employee’s requested profile. Do not confuse this mission with trying to find the executive who will most likely succeed in the job. Often it is quite clear to a search consultant that the employer is inflexible about qualifications that are not important to the success of the candidate or has a very poor selection process that will prevent them from finding the best person. This may be quite frustrating for executives who believe they are (and may be) highly qualified, but cannot get past the search consultant.”

Remember, their influence is limited. Recruiters can help you get face time with a client, but they can’t really help close the deal. Once you secure an interview, you’re on your own. “I will do everything possible to help my candidates present themselves effectively, but ultimately, the hiring decision is not mine,” says Steve Kendall, president of Management Recruiters of Atlanta West Inc. “Also, I can’t control what a candidate actually does during the hiring process. ‘Beauty is in the eye of the beholder’ and chemistry between the candidate and the company is the wild card I can’t control.”

Get to the point quickly. Recruiters don’t have time to search for these metrics. They must be easy to see. “Don’t sell yourself — present your experience, expertise, skills and unique capabilities in a professional and polished manner,” advises Prichard, who held an HR role in a venture capital firm’s internal executive search practice that placed about 250 C-level executives.

“You are not competing for a position as much as you are trying to show that you are a fit for the position. When you are sending a résumé in cold, you must walk a fine line of being specific so that you are quickly identified for a search, but not being so specific that you are eliminated from consideration,” continues Prichard.

Sometimes, those specific achievements can be communicated without a résumé. “Sending a résumé is actually less important than providing the search consultant with three to four bullet points highlighting competencies and desires,” says Nosal. “The search consultant will then drill down with the executive in a follow-up conversation or meeting.”

The Follow Up

Once a candidate makes that initial call, sends the first email, and forwards a résumé, he’s typically unsure about how (and if) to follow-up with recruiters. Do recruiters want to hear from a potential candidate or should candidates just wait until recruiters make the next move?

Most recruiters say that they will call candidates if they are a match for a particular position, but they don’t completely discourage candidates from placing a follow-up call or sending a follow-up email. “You can follow-up, but don’t be disappointed if you don’t get a response,” says Andy Borkin, president of Strategic Advancement Inc., a human resource consulting firm based in Bridgewater, N.J. Recruiters say they don’t have a lot of time in their days to follow-up with every candidate.

“I think the biggest challenge for executives is that at times they feel as though they are being ignored by executive search consultants. Sometimes this is simply due to the pace and demands of our industry,” says Nosal, adding that recruiters typically manage four or five

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active assignments simultaneously. “Speaking personally, I don’t have an extra 10 minutes in any given work day. My energy and attention are entirely focused on clients and candidates.”

To increase the chances that recruiters will follow up with you, you really need to build a long-lasting relationship with them. They’re more apt to stay in touch with candidates they know. Ideally, you shouldn’t wait until you’re looking for a job before you start building such relationships. “An executive should identify two or three very senior executive search consultants and cultivate relationships with them over the years,” says Nosal. “Waiting until one actually needs to reach out makes the contact a very tactical exercise. The more strategic approach is to build a true partnership.”

(For more details about relationship building and networking, see *Why Should I Contact a Recruiter When I’m Not Looking for a Job?* in this issue.)

Help Recruiters Help You

Keep in mind that you need to do everything you can to help recruiters help you. You can’t expect them to do all of your legwork. Only you can really position yourself as the best candidate. “The candidates who move to the top of our list are the ones who help us market them,” says Kendall. “Providing honest input, being open to constructive criticism and advice, and guiding our job search efforts helps. We know thousands of people in our recruiting area of specialization, but we don’t know which companies interest our candidate the most or which ones shouldn’t be contacted at all. The candidate also probably has access to company information we may not have (trade show directories and trade organization member lists). Sharing this information with us almost assures we will and can market them better than someone who doesn’t.”

Glenn Gutmacher, senior recruiting researcher at Microsoft and founder of Recruiting-Online.com, suggests creating online profiles that provide information to help recruiters identify you as a solid

match. “Due to a mistaken perception that passive candidates (ones not looking for a job) are better than active ones, some recruiters prefer who they find there over candidates obtained from a résumé database,” says Gutmacher. “Make your profile as much like a résumé as possible.”

“Try to have a good idea of who your next employer is and what your next role will be and be able to articulate it,” adds Bradford. “If they’re a client of mine, that’s an easy introduction to make.” Having that list of companies can really help a recruiter market you (and even enable you to market yourself), notes Gutmacher. “These shouldn’t just be the three top players in your industry (who everyone pitches and the recruiter probably already knows),” he says.

Honesty is the Best Policy

A key facet of the information-sharing process between candidates and recruiters is honesty. Recruiters stress the importance of candidates presenting themselves accurately. If they don’t, they are guaranteed to destroy any relationship they have built with a recruiter. Their partnerships with client companies are vital to recruiters; and if you aren’t honest, it will jeopardize your recruiter’s relationship with his client.

“If there is any sense that you are being less than truthful, the question is going to get probed,” says Borkin. “The search firm’s reputation is at stake.” Borkin advises candidates not to lie about their salary history or their previous job performance. If recruiters learn that you are lying, they won’t continue to work with you, he adds.

Bradford says it’s important for candidates to understand what their true motivations are and communicate them. Also, make sure that you can accept a position if it is offered. Don’t waste recruiters’ time if various criteria will be a dealbreaker in accepting that new job. “When you start working with a search firm, be certain that you can give two weeks notice,” says Bradford. “Try to be clear as early in the process as possible.” If you’re considering a cross-country move, make sure your spouse or significant other is on board, before your recruiter does legwork on an opportunity that you will eventually have to turn down.

The Unemployed Perception

Recruiters disagree about whether there is a stigma related to them working with unemployed candidates. A common perception among candidates is that recruiters (and their client companies) prefer to deal strictly with at-work executives.

Borkin notes how in today’s work environment, many companies are downsizing, leaving many strong executives out-of-work. “You’ve got a lot of good people out there; and through no fault of their own, they are unemployed,” says Borkin. “I don’t care if you’re employed or not employed, if you have a good reason.”

Bradford concurs that the reason for unemployment must be good, believable, and not look like a trend. “If it looks like a pattern, that could be a problem, and it could remain a problem,” says Bradford.

“Be honest, but don’t use a hostile, angry or other inappropriate story,” adds Spawr. “It tells a lot of tales about the teller, and recruiters don’t want to refer somebody who is angry or in denial.” Unfortunately, some recruiters won’t present unemployed candidates regardless of the story. “I had a well-established search consultant tell a group of unemployed executives that he does not present any unemployed candidates because ‘it is too much work to understand why they are unemployed and explain it to the hiring manager.’ This is not the norm,” says Prichard.

Yet, it’s not just what caused executives to be unemployed that can sometimes make recruiters hesitant to work with them; it’s what some do once they begin their job search. “The biggest problem with unemployed executives is that they may have already blanketed their industry with their résumé, and companies are reluctant to pay recruiters for someone they find is already in their human resource database,” says Kendall.

He adds that candidates need to tell recruiters if they have contacted the companies that the recruiter intends to contact on their behalf. If they don’t, the recruiter will find out. Kendall notes that many companies compile databases containing the names of people who have submitted résumés.

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“If they’ve already ‘wallpapered the industry,’ the candidate can only hope the recruiter gets a job assignment they fit very well and that the recruiter believes it’s worthwhile getting them considered without running the risk of being paid no fee,” adds Kendall.

The Industry Transition

If you’re seeking to change industries, keep in mind that recruiters aren’t career counselors and probably can’t advise you on such a change in your career path. In this case, you may be better served by a career coach who can help guide your transition. Kendall says that his client companies typically seek candidates with specific experience in the client’s arena. “Someone without knowledge of the industry, products and competition is very unlikely to get selected versus the other candidates I will bring to the company,” adds Kendall. “The only exception, which is rare, is the company who specifically wants someone from outside their industry.”

Borkin says that if a candidate has worked in a specific industry for more than 10 years, his chances of being able

Expert Resources:

- Andy Borkin, Strategic Advancement Inc. (sai-hr.com)
- Krista Bradford, The Good Search (TheGoodSearch.net)
- Glenn Gutmacher, Recruiting-Online.com (Recruiting-Online.com)
- Steve Kendall, Management Recruiters of Atlanta West Inc. (steve@mraw.net)
- David Nosal, Nosal Partners LLC (NosalPartners.com)

to switch industries are slim. “The longer you stay, the more difficult it is,” he adds.

Making the Dream Come True

The real key to success in the recruiter-candidate relationship is if the individuals form a true partnership and work in concert to achieve their goals. Understanding what each individual needs can help ensure that happens.

“What do all parties want? They want a process that is smooth and fast; then, they get quality candidates in record time with minimal effort; and candidates get ideal positions,” says Robert Wilson, president of Tyler, Texas-based executive recruiting firm R.L. Wilson & Associates LLC and an ExecuNet member. “The more that is communicated upfront and the more thorough information is communicated, the better.”

It’s important to always remember that when working with recruiters, you’re

not competing for a job; your objective is to be identified by recruiters as the ideal candidate for their client. If you’re not a match, don’t ruin the relationship. “If you are not viewed as a perfect fit for the job, there is nothing you can do but leave a favorable impression of being professional, mature and talented,” says Prichard. “It is not in your best interest to criticize, argue with, challenge or create conflict with a search consultant no matter how unprofessionally you may be treated or how poor the search consultant communicates with you. Just remember him or her when it is your time to hire a search consultant.” Recruiters always appreciate referrals, and will keep you top-of-mind if you serve as a source of other candidates.

“If everyone followed the golden rule and put themselves in the other party’s shoes and considered their needs, the whole process would go smoother and be more efficient,” adds Wilson. ■

Insider Insight

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Once you have made an initial contact, follow up on an irregularly regular basis. Have a reason to call or email, not just to check on their search status. Let recruiters know when an organization

may be having a monthly meeting or a conference. Information heard on the street is always good, such as a potential purchase, layoff, or internal cultural issues that a company may have. ■

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