



The people process

Gaynor Lowndes explores the value of effective candidate management

You've heard it said before: Recruitment is a sales profession. This is definitely true, but there is one obvious yet very significant difference between recruiters and other sales roles: Other salespeople sell products, recruiters sell people.

This adds a whole new element to our work. Candidates are not material products, they are people whose needs, goals and feelings need to be taken into account. Yet many consultants seem to forget this. They devote so much consideration to the needs and priorities of a client who pays them the fee, but they forget that their candidate is more than just a commodity to sell.

This may sound exaggerated, but many consultants take on such an attitude without even realising it. It is no coincidence that many candidates report that they do not feel that they were well-treated, or that their needs were well-considered, during the recruitment process.

This is a widespread problem, but it isn't difficult to remedy. As a consultant, develop a relationship with your candidates. A relationship is like a two way street: If your candidates are confident that both their career and personal

needs are being made a priority in the recruitment process, then you, as a consultant, can be confident that your candidate will be committed and loyal, increasing the likelihood of successful placement, and ensuring that the candidate will provide positive word of mouth to other potential candidates, about the quality service he or she received from you.

The relationship with your candidate effectively begins at the registration stage, where the candidate usually calls to be registered, either generally or in response to a particular vacancy. You, as the consultant, will pre-screen the candidate either during their initial call, or you will return their call later, and conduct a pre-screen then.

And it is at this early stage that consultant – candidate relationships often become damaged. As a trainer, I often ask my participants: "What are the implications of you not returning pre-screen calls quickly enough?"

The answer is obvious enough: The candidate will lose faith in your agency almost immediately, and try one of your competitors instead. It is absolutely essential that you return the pre-screen call the same day that

the candidate called. This shows them that you are committed to making them a priority. Remember: You have to be the first to show commitment, and they will respond by giving you their commitment.

Studies have shown that 95% of the impact of our communication does not come from what we say, but how we say it. Keep this statistic in mind while pre-screening your candidate. Use a warm and friendly tone of voice to put them at ease, and take your time, to ensure that they feel as though they are important. Your manner during the pre-screen call is the very first impression the candidate will receive of you as a consultant, and therefore, you cannot assume that your candidate will turn up for an interview, just because you booked one during the pre-screen call. No, it just isn't that simple. If you are insensitive, impatient, or unenthusiastic during a pre-screen call, then expect a "No-show."

It is also important not to leave too big a gap between the pre-screen and the interview. In a candidate short market, candidates have the luxury of picking their agencies, and you want this candidate to pick yours. Therefore, you



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need to get in quickly, by arranging an interview date which assures the candidate that you are committed to them now, not in a month's time. If the gap between the pre-screen and interview is any more than a couple of days, then your candidate will begin to doubt your commitment to getting the process moving, and may look for an agency that can offer him or her a faster process, and not even bother to turn up for your interview.

Such "No-Shows" are a widespread problem in our industry, yet simple common sense on your part, can ensure that the candidate feels sufficiently comfortable with you personally, and confident in you professionally, to keep the appointment.

The other thing to keep in mind, when it comes to treating your candidate well at pre-screen, is that if he or she is satisfied with the way you have handled the call, they will generally be more than willing to provide you with referrals to people they know who might make quality candidates, and generally marketing information, about competitors and potential clients. Your candidate has been out on the market, so no one has more insight than they do, as to what the market is doing.

The relationship between you and your candidate really kicks into gear during the interview stage, but don't be fooled into thinking that this stage begins only when you meet them and sit down for the interview. In fact, it is absolutely essential to look at how well your candidates are treated whilst they are waiting for an interview, in your reception area.

The Golden Rule certainly applies here: Treat your candidates the way you would wish to be treated in the same situation. Make sure the chairs of the waiting room are comfortable, that the receptionist is friendly and alert, that refreshments of some kind are offered, that the candidate does not have to wait long, and that he or she is not inundated with paperwork and initial testing. As you can see, the candidate, by the time he or she actually meets you in the flesh, has already come to some conclusions about you and your service.

Apart from the obvious motive of gathering information about the candidate's suitability for the role, the interview also works the other way around: It gives the candidate information about how genuinely interested you as a recruiter are in helping them and satisfying their career needs ... in short, how suitable YOU are for finding them the right role.

With this in mind, it is important to commence the interview by setting an agenda: What we will be covering, what the purpose of the interview is. Clarity will put the candidate at ease.

Always make sure that the candidate does more talking than you do. Ask open questions that will allow the candidate to talk about themselves, and thus feel more in control. Body

language is extremely important: Good posture and eye contact show that you are interested in what they have to say, and your gestures and movements need to be adjusted, depending on what style of personality you perceive them to have.

An essential point to remember here is to exchange commitment during the interview process. Tell the candidate that you are committed to making them a priority in your work, and that, for this to happen, you need a commitment from them not to register with any other agency for a period of time. As before, if the candidate feels comfortable that you have their best interests in mind, then there is no reason why they will not commit to an agency that will get them results. It is important, however, to only make this commitment if you

“Treat your candidates the way you would wish to be treated in the same situation”

believe that this candidate is highly placable enough to be worth extra priority.

You may have already asked for candidate referrals at the pre-screen stage, but now that you have built up a greater personal rapport with your candidate, the conclusion to the interview is an even better time. Once again, there is no reason why you will not get a positive response, if the candidate is happy with your service. If the candidate you have interviewed is not suitable, ask them if they know potential candidates who might be interested. If the candidate is suitable for the current role, you can describe to them a different role you are also trying to fill, and ask if they know anyone who may be interested in it.

In this candidate-short market, it is imperative that you stay close to your candidates after the

interview. Don't assume, as so many recruiters do, that the candidate will automatically accept an offer. You need to know where your short-listed candidates are, and who they are interviewing with. I cannot stress this enough: You need to stay in control of the recruitment process.

Expect counter offers. Remember that it's far cheaper for a company to throw a few thousand dollars at an existing employee, than to recruit and retrain a new one. An essential part of candidate care is to counsel your candidates on how to resign, discuss counter offers, and most importantly, stay close, even after they have accepted the offer, as this does not necessarily guarantee that they will start.

You can maintain profitable relationships with your candidates, regardless of whether you actually place them or not. A candidate who you have not been able to place will still appreciate the effort you put in to place them, and the warm, personalised service you provided them with. Therefore, they won't hesitate to recommend you to their friends and colleagues, other potential candidates. Don't waste this opportunity to get valuable referrals from them, and remember, they themselves may need your services again in the future. Indeed, those recruiters who understand the importance of proper candidate care and management, enjoy working with the same candidates many times during their career, either as candidates seeking new opportunity, or as clients.

Remember, the biggest billers don't fluke their way to success. They understand the importance of every single candidate relationship, and the direct and indirect profit opportunities they provide. Do you want loyal and committed candidates, who spread positive word-of-mouth about your agency, and who come back to you as both candidates and clients? It isn't difficult; all you need to do is care for your candidates! ■



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