

Symptoms of a great recruiter!

By Gaynor Lowndes, MD of The Recruitment Training Company & The Recruitment and Training Factory

What do you look for when you employ new consultants? I ask this question at each of the leadership workshops that I run, and the answers vary greatly in relevance and quality. This variance concerns me, because it says to me that as an industry we tend to be somewhat uncertain about the characteristics that make a worthwhile recruiter. Look around at the other industries and professions, and you will generally find very clear, across-the-board standards as to what skills and qualities are expected.

I would love to see the same clarity of standard emerge within the recruitment field. The positive benefits of quality employees are felt at all levels in the industry, and it is time to look closely at what characteristics are common to all successful recruitment professionals, so that we know what to look for, for the sake of our businesses, and the industry as a whole:

Quality 1: Does your potential employee have “the recruiters’ combination”?

This is a term that I use in my training, to define the rare and valuable mix of a potentially great consultant. The consultant will have the following two characteristics: 1. The emotional intelligence of a life coach. 2. The determination and drive of a salesperson.

Rare? Yes. Necessary? Absolutely! I have found many managers in my training mention one of the above characteristics – without the other. However, experience as a manager has taught me that the psychologist lacks the drive, and salesperson lacks the insight, and managers in my training generally agree when I point this out.

Granted, I am talking about ‘360’ consultants here, those who manage the entire process, from sourcing to placement. This is because I believe that, for the purposes of cohesion and consistency in putting together the needs of both candidate and client, this is the best way to handle the process.

We are left with the reality that the successful recruitment consultant is a rare combination of two very different characteristics. This may be hard to accept, especially considering the high turnover and shortages within the industry, but these rare individuals are the ones that will get you results!

Quality 2: Does your potential employee have previous sales experience?

Can there be a successful recruitment consultant who has not had previous experience in

another field of sales? Of course, I’m certainly not ruling it out. I am, however, pointing out that a rich practical insight into effective sales strategies will naturally give your employee a head start in recruitment. They are more likely to achieve results sooner, and in the meantime it will, to some extent, relieve your training burden, as you will not have to teach them the basics of approaching recruitment as a sales profession.

Considering my previous point regarding the combination of sales and psychological insight: why do I appear to emphasise the former rather than the latter? My reasons are simple: while I maintain that the combination is essential, I would argue that the sales skills are more important. Psychological insight and intuition are necessary, but sales skills and experience are the components that drive the recruitment process forward to successful placement, in a way that psychological qualifications and/or experience cannot.

I have worked with and trained consultants who have backgrounds in areas as diverse as insurance, real estate, artistic management, and IT. I cannot escape the fact that there is an understanding and confidence in their handling of the recruitment process, that is often not found in those who do not have this sales grounding.

Quality 3: Does your potential employee have a track record of commitment?

It sounds generic, I know. Every employer, regardless of the field, wants commitment from an employee. What makes this quality especially important to a recruitment employer? The answer is obvious: The disturbingly high consultant turnover in the industry.

The detrimental impact that the high turnover has had to agencies across the industry cannot be overestimated. The question and issue of commitment must be considered of paramount importance when recruitment businesses hire new staff. Remember this the next time your organisation hires: one committed consultant is worth a hundred ‘free spirits’. Don’t be fooled by self-confidence and drive. Both are essential qualities, but remember to gauge whether they appear interested in contributing to your company’s long-term vision, and make this a deciding factor in your selection processes.

Quality 4: Does your potential employee show an interest in, and a willingness to research and understand the industry they will be recruiting for?

I have never subscribed to the belief that a consultant needs to have qualifications or experience in the industry they recruit for. As someone who started out as an accountant, and then moved into accounting recruitment, I will be the first to declare that it is beneficial. However, as I have emphasised earlier, it is far more important to have the “recruiters’ combination” that will bring success regardless of the sector you are recruiting for.

I believe that it is essential for any consultant to research and develop an expert’s understanding of their designated fields. Recent surveys of client satisfaction revealed that a key source of frustration for today’s client is the recruiter’s lack of understanding of ‘what we do’. An extreme and disturbing example involves an accounting employer providing a job spec for an assistant accountant position, and getting the resumes of data entry clerks!

I train a real estate consulting team in the Melbourne area, where some of the consultants have experience in the field, and others do not. I suggested that they conduct internal training in the relevant aspects of the real estate industry, and conclude that training by testing the knowledge of the non-experienced consultants, to ensure that they were equipped with the knowledge and insight to effectively recruit in this sector. They conducted the training as I suggested, and the result was an almost immediate increase in revenue and reputation for the agency.

Recruitment is not rocket science, but be careful not to underestimate the combination of truly special qualities that make a successful recruiter. I am optimistic that if we work together to ensure that our professionals possess these qualities, our reputation and success will be greatly improved. ■



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