

# Using the downturn to your advantage

By Gaynor Lowndes of The Recruitment Training Company and GaynorLowndes.com

I have trained a number of exceptional recruiters in my time. However, I can honestly say that one of the most inspiring success stories I have come across in 25 years, involves an old client of mine, Rodger Beiser.

Rodger is Managing Director of Melbourne-based generalist Upfront Recruitment. Last April, he did what many considered either impossible, brave or very stupid: he started the business just as the economy was beginning to slow. Today, even more surprisingly, Upfront Recruitment is thriving in an economic environment where many agencies are failing, and almost all are struggling.

I asked Rodger to explain what sets him and his company apart. The answer he gave may surprise you: "Gaynor, I don't actually see the downturn in these negative terms. This is actually a very good time for the recruitment industry because the exceptional recruiters stand out."

An unusual sentiment, yes. But Rodger sees the downturn as an opportunity for the recruitment industry to salvage its reputation, and change its methodologies, from the running of recruitment businesses to the execution of the recruitment process.

"It's a chance for us to offer real value, and be seen as a real profession", he says.

So, what do Rodger and his team at Upfront do differently to offer real value in their services and project themselves as true recruitment professionals?

## Candidate care

Candidates who submit their résumés to Upfront Recruitment are often pleasantly surprised at the speed and efficiency of response, and the personalised quality of candidate care. Rodger recalls a recent example where a lady who sent her resume received a call from Upfront within 24 hours, and couldn't believe it.

"Her previous experience was that she would have to wait at least two weeks for a

call-back, and even then it might not happen at all", says Rodger.

As it turned out, Upfront Recruitment was not able to place this candidate, but Rodger and his team made sure they kept in contact with her, provided her with advice if she needed it, and generally treated her with respect.

"We make sure all our candidates have a good experience with us, even if we cannot place them", says Rodger.

## Client relationships

Recruiters are often in "transactional" mode when they call up a client to elicit business from them. Instead of taking the time to research the company to gain insight to their specific needs, consultants simply take the company name, call the number and assume a relationship will magically develop from nothing.

"At Upfront, we provide the client with a value proposition", says Rodger. "This is based on the research we undertake to understand their company, and understand their needs. Having said that, we never assume that we know exactly what they need. That comes later."

Rodger also notes that recruiters place too much emphasis on the client's organisation as a whole, without concern for the individuals within it.

"There are individuals within the company, all of whom are different and respond differently based on personality. It's important to remember that just because the line manager gives you the green light, it doesn't mean that the HR manager is automatically on-board."

## Leading the recruitment team

In an industry like ours, with few barriers to entry in terms of qualifications and training, the question is often asked: what makes the better consultant – passion or experience?

"If I had to choose between passion or experience, I would go for passion every time",

Rodger says. "The business works because I want to make it work, and so do they. No amount of experience and longevity can substitute for that."

How does Rodger maintain this level of passion within his staff over the long term? He believes it is a simple matter of leading by example.

"They are motivated because they see me doing what I ask them to do. So for example, they see me cold calling, and they are motivated to do it. I don't just give the orders, I'm in there with them as well."

Rodger is also a great believer in long and short-term goal setting, and he maintains that it is the key to success in any economic environment.

"Firstly, you need to set goals that are achievable. Secondly, they need to be measurable and documented. It's important to have smaller short-term goals within larger goals. Break it up into manageable steps, and keep it gradual."

Here we have an agency that has transcended the negative reputation of the industry, and the results speak for themselves. I hope that recruiters everywhere can learn from their methods, and that one day these results will be evident throughout the entire industry. ■



**Gaynor Lowndes** set up The Recruitment Training Company in 2001 to provide specific recruitment skills training to recruiters. It has grown to be the largest

provider of skills-based training to the recruitment industry. In addition, Gaynor provides success coaching services via GaynorLowndes.com.