

Creating a great candidate base

In this market, quality candidates are like gold. Find one and you can place him/her very easily. The trick is to get the candidate before your competitor does. Ask yourself what you can offer that your competitor doesn't. Big billers understand the importance of candidates returning.

I have always held the philosophy no matter how busy I am that I treat people how I would wish to be treated. I am sure you have either experienced or heard about recruitment agencies that treat candidates like cattle – herding them in, registering them and then NOTHING! Maybe that used to work when we had loads of candidates and no jobs, but times have changed. Worse still there are those that don't return calls and as a candidate you are left wondering why these recruiters won't help you. I have experienced all of those scenarios, which is why I am so adamant about treating people properly. In addition, you can never be sure whom an individual knows. Consider the bad experience at a restaurant – you tell everyone you know. A bad experience at a recruitment agency is the same! It always amazes me why recruiters haven't worked this one out yet. My advice is see less people and work them properly.

In a competitive industry such as ours, first impressions are extremely important. I believe the relationship with your candidate starts at the initial call and is cemented when they walk into your office to meet you for the first time. If they are a quality candidate, then you need to get them in quickly – remember that if active, it is quite likely you are one of a few agencies he/she will be calling today. Sound like you want to talk to him/her rather than going through the process. Actively listen to what you are being told rather than thinking about what you will be doing next. Pre-screen properly and you will spend less time interviewing inappropriate candidates who believe that you have wasted their time.

As far as possible, ensure that your reception area is inviting and don't leave candidates waiting unnecessarily. I am not and never have been an advocate of a candidate filling

in an application form and then being tested (which can take up to one hour) before seeing a consultant. First impressions count!

The way your candidates are treated initially really makes a difference, especially when you will be asking for referrals at the end of the interview. If you must test a candidate before you interview them, at least come out to reception to let them know the process so that at least there has been some contact.

The interview is about gaining information in order for you to be able to assist the person sitting in front of you as well as finding the right person for your client. Don't make promises that you can't keep just because it's what you believe your candidate wants to hear. Always consider how you would feel if it were you in your candidate's shoes. If you are going to ask for exclusivity, make sure that you make a commitment as well. Set a time line of when you will come back to your candidate. Big billers are not frightened of feedback. Ask your candidates how your process compared with your competitors. Ask your candidates which consultants they have met whom they particularly liked. Find out why – it will help you continuously improve.

Regular follow up is very important, whether your candidates are active or not. It may be that you don't necessarily telephone them; maybe you follow up with a regular e-newsletter or personalised e-mail. Technology has made it much easier to keep in touch with your candidates.

Long before we had the benefits of e-mail, during my years as a permanent accounting recruiter, my regular routine included taking 3 to 5 candidate files home a day and calling the candidates between 7.30 - 8.30 pm for a catch up. This helped my time management immensely. It was also on the whole a positive experience for the candidates as it was not expected and added to the service that I provided. They gave mountains of useful information like where they had been on interview; what other agencies (my competitors) were saying and how they generally felt about the process of looking for a job. It enabled

me to build a rapport with them that I don't believe I could have built given the incredible time pressures we are under in our job during the day.

In summary, tips to create a great candidate base include:

- Taking candidate calls and returning them in a timely manner
- Pre-screen properly so that you only interview those individuals you can help
- Have an inviting reception area and introduce yourself early in the registration process
- Don't promise what you can't deliver to your candidates
- Ask for exclusivity only if you can deliver an interview in the next 48 hours
- Follow up regularly – even with those candidates that you didn't place as they will come back to you when they are ready for another job change. They will also refer their friends! ■



Gaynor Lowndes

the Managing Director of The Recruitment Training Company has over 17 years recruitment experience, gained in Australia and the UK. The Recruit-

ment Training Company provides training and consulting services to the recruitment industry in Australia and New Zealand.