



NATURAL SELECTION

Take the initiative and aim to build a successful relationship with your recruiters.

Recruitment consultants want to be pals, not pests. HR can at least meet them in the middle.

By Gaynor Lowndes

The recruitment industry has had a bad name with HR professionals for a long time, and the sheer number of recruitment companies looking for work has a lot to do with it. Some HR managers get 10–15 calls a day and keep their voice mail on all day to avoid them. Instead of being a value-add to HR departments, recruitment consultants have become a necessary evil. An ‘us and them’ situation has developed.

Some consultants talk about how they avoid HR departments at all costs and prefer to canvass line managers directly. This only exacerbates the situation as HR becomes more negative towards the consultants.

One solution is for HR to take calls from recruiters between allotted times each day. In the words of the voice mail of a person in HR who looks after recruitment: “This is xx from xx. I am unavailable to take your call at the moment. If you are from a recruitment company, I am available to speak with you between 4.30pm and 5pm. For other calls, please leave a message after the tone.”

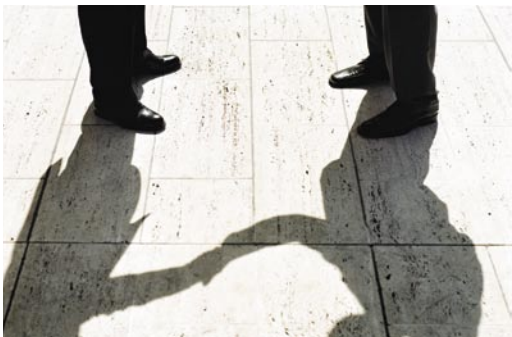
Whether you like it or not, a large part of a recruitment consultant’s job is to canvass for new business. In many organisations, if a consultant doesn’t ‘cut it’ within three months—they haven’t found enough new business—they’re out the door. One of their difficulties is that many organisations are willing to accept mediocre service from their current agency rather than spend

time getting to know potentially exceptional service providers.

In the interests of getting the best for your business, I would suggest interviewing at least one new recruiter a week. Incidentally, all recruiters know that when you say “send me something” it’s just a way to get rid of them. And the good ones know that relationships start with face-to-face meetings, not over the phone, which is why they are persistent.

MOST PEOPLE think all recruitment agencies do the same thing, and they do. They provide you with a shortlist for a given job brief. But, having worked for many types of agencies over 20 years, from three-person businesses to large multinationals, I can tell you that that’s where the similarity ends.

You should select your recruitment firm carefully, depending on your culture and environment. Look at the level of experience at sourcing →



→ and selecting the type of staff you require. Consider how many clients or roles they work on at any one time, indicating the time they will have available to work on your job briefs.

Examine their key performance indicators (sales budgets) to get an indication of how important your business will be in the scheme of things. What's their typical methodology, especially their sourcing and screening techniques?

Another consideration is 'candidate care'—do their candidates come back for help again? Is the experience with this particular recruiter pleasurable?

Be wary of consultants who tell you they are not paid commission. It is highly likely that they are paid a 'bonus' instead, and it's based on how many placements they make.

If you want the best possible service and best candidates referred, also be wary of asking for or accepting offers of big fee discounts. If the fee is eroded too much, the consultant needs to work more jobs to reach their target, which means less time spent on sourcing and selecting for each role. By all means negotiate a rate for volume or rebates based on spend, but don't expect a flat reduction in return for business.

Honesty and ethics is another consideration when engaging recruitment companies. Consultants can promise the earth to get business, but the proof is in the pudding, and good relationships depend on good communication. At the very least before giving someone your business, you should request both a client and candidate reference (for the particular consultant you are dealing with) as well as negotiating some agreed key performance indicators. You need to agree on method and frequency of contact, price, time frames from brief to shortlist and so on. Like any relationship, set the ground rules up front and you're unlikely to go too far wrong.

If you brief several agencies on a role, expect a less than thorough search and to receive lots of résumés that kind of fit the job description, but not precisely. This is because the agencies know they have to work quickly to get the candidates' résumés to you before their competitors in case they both put the same candidate forward.

It is never wise to work this way. You pay the same fee whether you receive this kind of service or a more detailed service from briefing a consultant exclusively. Or you can retain a recruiter, paying a fee for service rather than for success—a better way to build a relationship. ✕

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