

Know which type of recruiter is right for your job search

By Lisa Chenofsky Singer

As appeared in The Star Ledger Guest Column on November 12th, 2009 (www.nj.com)

In this job market, it is essential for job-seekers to utilize all available resources. Aside from a polished résumé and in-person/online networking, it may be helpful to work with a recruiter.

How do you work with recruiters to find your next opportunity? The approach will depend on the type of recruiter. And there are a few to choose from — the executive search recruiter (retained or headhunter), contingency/staffing agency (temporary or contract) and corporate recruiter (in-house recruiter known as a talent acquirer).

Here's a primer on the types of recruiters and how they operate:

Executive search or retained recruiter, also known as "headhunters," are similar to contingency recruiters in that the company pays the fees. The main difference is the company pays the headhunter a retainer fee to perform the search. A partial fee is paid upfront, another third after 30 days, and the balance after 60 days. The retainer is paid whether or not a placement/hire is made. Companies typically use retained search firms for higher level and executive level positions. Retained recruiters are typically aligned with a specific practice or a function and are well-connected with a strong candidate pool.

The headhunter will present you only after you have been thoroughly "vetted" as a candidate. Your relationship with the headhunter as a potential candidate will be based on the accurate fit of your skills, abilities, experiences, reputation and the right chemistry (style and personality) relative to the position they are working on. In today's electronic age, it is easy to review your reputation online.

The retained consultant will have an "exclusive" with the company, meaning they are the only one working to fill the position.

The executive search consultant typically values long-standing relationships with client companies and top-notch candidates.

According to Susan Gottlieb, managing director of Sherwood's Talent Acquisition practice, she will entertain exploratory conversations with selective candidates who are referred to her by a client or colleague whenever possible.

That said, today's search success is clearly relationship driven and the more "touch points" a candidate has to a specific search, the better. Susan Gottlieb says she and her company, Sherwood Solutions are committed to providing "high-touch" services to their clients and candidates alike.

"Search consultants should not lose sight of the fact that the candidate experience is sacrosanct. The candidate I advise and engage with today, can become my client tomorrow!"

Contingency recruiters earn their fee only after successfully placing their candidate in a position. Typically, it is a game of numbers — right opening with the right candidate being available with the appropriate skills and in the right place at the right time.

The contingency recruiter deals in high volume of openings in a good market. The client company pays either a flat fee or a percentage of the first year's salary.

Staffing agency recruiters hire administrative support talent and/or professionals for a client company's temporary or contractual needs. Temporary needs occur during vacation periods, leaves of absences, and for special projects with a designated time period.

The agency is the temporary worker's employer, handling payroll, all wages, taxes, insurance and benefits. The temporary worker is usually on-site at a company for a specific time period.

The company client pays a premium hourly rate to the agency for the contracted temporary worker. The temporary time may be viewed as a "try and buy" option with reduced fees offered by the staffing agency if the temp is converted to a regular employee.

Working through a staffing agency allows you to gain exposure, additional experience and an understanding of the company's culture.

The talent acquirer is employed by the company for the purpose of finding and creating a talent pipeline. Most companies have this position focusing on external talent.

A strong corporate recruiter will work with the human resources team and hiring managers to understand when external talent is needed to fill skill gaps within the organization. This recruiter will work on multiple openings. The volume of résumés received for any given opening will vary depending on the market, advertising, job boards and referrals chosen.

Most in-house recruiters will see referred candidates, especially if referred by a senior professional or a well-respected colleague. When targeting a company directly, it is important to identify both, the corporate recruiter and the hiring manager. Keeping the corporate recruiter informed of your networking activities is the polite approach.

Using LinkedIn is critical for finding referral connections within a company. Abby Kohut of AbsolutelyAbby.com, says, "The key is to establish relationships with headhunters now for the future. So get to know the in-house corporate recruiters for your targeted companies."

How to find recruiters: Look in the Directory of Executive Recruiters, —more commonly known as the Red Book — published by Kennedy Publications.

The directory lists search firms, what they specialize in, where they are located and how long they have been in business. Many recruiters have their own websites where you can determine the area in which they specialize.

Online, try searching by category such as "legal or law headhunter." Use LinkedIn.com, where you can identify recruiters and learn about how long they have been recruiting, what they specialize in, and to read their recommendations from both clients and job seekers.

So, try thinking like a recruiter. What groups would you join? What keywords would you use? Combing the above resources along with your persistence, your motivation and your creativity will pay off.

Lisa Chenofsky Singer, of Chenofsky Singer & Associates, offers executive and career management coaching and human resources consulting. Lisa writes and speaks on job search and career-related topics. Her website is ChenofskySinger.com