

## *So, you find people jobs?*

By Scott Hahn

I was playing golf with a good friend of mine the other day, a person that I have played golf with for many years. In between shots, we always had short back and forth conversations. The day started out no different than any other until he asked me “So, how do you like being a recruiter now?” I told him that I loved it and was happy with the change of pace. Having been a CIO in the mortgage industry for many years, I was finally enjoying the freedom to work when I needed to work rather than working because my office and 9 hours of meetings were waiting for me. He then said to me “So, basically you find people jobs.” I thought about that statement for a minute. Lined up my shot and proceeded to put my approach shot into the green side bunker. After making bogey (that made two in a row) and concluding that I could use a healthy distraction, I decided to try and explain what I do as best I could.

Recruiting is far more complicated and far more challenging than most people think. There is a lot going on behind the scenes. The Wizard of Oz and the “man behind the green curtain” comes to mind. In its simplest form, recruiting is about putting two people together with mutually beneficial interests in mind, much like a matchmaker. Having already used another term for recruiting, I should probably go ahead and get all the names for recruiting out there: headhunters, executive search firms, placement agencies, career assistance counselor, executive staffing, and the list goes on. Regardless of what one calls him or her self, the job is basically the same, putting two people together that want to make a deal. If only it were just that simple.

I started out with a boutique firm that specializes in executive placement within the mortgage industry. A quick side bar here. “Executive placement” is a very loosely used term in the industry. It can generally be found associated with candidates that have fancy titles and/or bring in north of six figures annually. Anyway, when I started the first question that came to mind was “Do I need candidates or clients?” The answer, unfortunately, was “yes”. My next question was “Well, which do I need first?” The answer again was “yes”. This seemed somewhat paradoxical to me and even more paradoxically seemed about right. So I immediately set out finding both. When I joined the firm, I was asked to establish our IT Placement practice. The firm has traditionally placed executives other than IT related positions. It was an exciting proposition that I took on with all my energy. I noticed one problem immediately, “But how to go about building a database of both?” I decided to put together some marketing materials and refresh my contacts. Never under estimate the power of your contacts. Whether you are looking for next career move or trying to drum up some business. Your contacts can be one of your most valuable assets. After sending out a mass email to anyone that I had ever come in contact with over the years and subsequently getting very little response back. I decided to do it the old fashioned way. Pick up the phone and start calling. I spoke to anyone that would listen to my new story. Hour after hour, day after day, week after, well you get the picture. I took notes, I followed up on leads and I made cold calls. By the way, cold calling is the practice of calling on those people that don’t know you and probably don’t want to talk to you. After some time I learned that the phrase got its

name from the general chill you feel on the other end of the phone, I don't care how Webster's defines it. After some time, my efforts started to pick up and I finally landed my first search.

A "search" is general term used to describe the effort that is about to take place. This will sometimes be described as an order, a placement request, or a job search. Regardless of what you call it, they all mean the same thing, time to get busy and find some people. This can pose a problem, "Where do you find this person or persons?" The first rule of thumb that you learn is that "There are no easy searches", if there were the hiring manager would not be paying a fee in order to find this person. You, the recruiter must assume that the hiring manager has already exhausted his or her efforts and has now been forced to use the services of a recruiter. When you think about it, that's not exactly the way that you would like to start a business relationship with someone. As a recruiter, you get the distinct impression that the hiring manager would rather pay to have their gums scraped than work with a recruiter. But never the less, its time to get in there and earn that fee! This is probably a good time to mention that most recruiters are commission only. That's right, no salary, and no hourly wage. You get paid only if and when you can bring a deal to a close. This brings me to another industry term, "deal". This is most commonly referred to as the agreement between a hiring manager and the prospective employee (your candidate). The deal is consummated when the prospective employee not only agrees to and signs the offer letter, but actually shows up to work on the first day. I won't bore you with all the ways a deal can blow up prior to that magical start date just yet. From a recruiter's perspective, the deal is actually consummated and official when the payment for the invoice actually shows up in your mailbox. Then and only then is the deal done. But I digress.

So, now you have a signed order or search assignment. If you're lucky you got an exclusive. This is another not so well known fact. Not all search assignments are exclusive. That's right; you're not the only one working on the search. The company probably has their internal HR department and/or internal recruiters working on it. If that's the case you can eliminate going to most of the popular job boards to find your candidates as they will have undoubtedly exhausted those resources long before they called you in. Additionally, the hiring manager probably also has another search firm working on this. This makes the job even tougher, because they have probably begun working the niche job boards already. If these are the facts there is little to do but pick up the phone and start making phone calls. You'll want to start making calls to everyone you know and/or ever worked with that is a reasonable fit. With any luck these people will be interested in the opportunity and/or know someone who might be. This becomes a blend of calling people you know and the dreaded cold calling. Cold calling people that are gainfully employed is a very different experience from cold calling prospective hiring managers. Cold calling those people employed is often a more iceberg like experience. I think these calls should be called "North Pole calls" or "frozen tundra calls", because that's how they feel. First you have chilling cold attitude on the other end of the phone, but more importantly you have what little information about this person in front of you, the proverbial tip of the iceberg. If I could magically wave my wand and change anything in the recruiting process it would be this one area. I'm often disappointed in

people's reactions to these calls. The reactions range from abrupt "goodbyes" and slamming the phone down, to "thanks but no thanks". I think that more people should see these calls for what they generally are, opportunity not only knocking, but calling. The fact is that in most instances, these peoples' names have been given as referrals. That means that the person on the receiving end of the call must have done something to impress someone in their career, or the person that made the referral would not have given out their name and number. I've often asked people "What would be the harm in at least listening to what I have to say? The worst that can happen is that you hear out the opportunity and now can make an informed decision to simply say, no thank you". Alas, this is not the case. So this very frustrating process of frozen tundra calls and abruptly rude disconnects can take weeks. That is unless one of your competitors is closing in on the search. So while making all these calls, both warm and extremely cold you must place calls into the hiring manager to ensure that you still understand where they are in their process and you still have a chance to get a candidate or two in there. This can also be very frustrating as the hiring manager is typically very busy and doesn't always have the time to return your calls.

After hours and hours of efforts you finally get someone that will listen. Thank goodness! It must be your lucky day! You must now describe (sell) the opportunity to this wonderful person that will finally let you talk. If and only if, they are still interested you now have a shot at a real live potential candidate. Thus begins the process of screening or pre-screening. The depth and associated name for this practice will depend on your client's (the hiring manager) requirements. This is generally considered to be reviewing the (potential) candidate's resume, verifying income, checking references, etc. If all goes well through this process and everything checks out, your preliminary interview process can begin. In our firm, we prefer to conduct face to face interviews for all candidates, particularly those who did not come from referrals that we know and trust. This is not the practice of all firms, though I wish it were. So you go through the challenges of getting schedules to align and finding the time to meet and have a meaningful dialogue. This process can be rigorous and time consuming depending on the recruiter, the hiring manager, that relationship and the strength of the candidate on paper (the resume). While managing this process you must also remember that you still must find other potential candidates and in your spare time and must continue to make those dreaded cold calls to drum up more search assignments (business). And so begins the journey of becoming a professional juggler.

Interviewing is much more of an art form than a science. It can be a daunting task and even harder when you are trying to second guess your client and their true needs. The primary purpose for preliminary interviewing as a recruiter is to ensure that those candidates you wish to present are worth presenting. They must have the necessary background, experience and knowledge to do the job. Most importantly, they must be a good cultural fit and have a professional demeanor. If you have enough potential candidates lined up, this can take several days or as much as weeks to go through. The goal is to take several potential candidates and determine one or two that are the most suitable for the company and job. If you have done your job well, these potential candidates become candidates. You are now ready to present them to your client.

The term “present” is another broadly used term in the industry. It is typically the practice of introducing the candidate to the hiring manager and/or client. This can be done in a variety of ways. The most common seem to be, via email, phone or face to face. While each has its merits, the important element of each is the approach, rather than the vehicle through which each is done. The most effective approach to present candidates requires that you put some thought in to how you would like to put your candidate in the best light, without selling your candidate to the client. The last thing you need is a slick sales pitch that sticks and the candidate get fired weeks later. This is a very fine line that you must learn to walk on a daily basis. After doing all this work, there is a big part of you that would love to sell the notion of your candidate’s perfect match. The part that is easy to forget is that you, your reputation, and relationship with the client are on the line. Your recommendations must always be your most honest opinions rather than a great PowerPoint show on your candidate and his or her abilities to leap huge problems in a single bound. This is an extremely challenging part of the business that can make or break you in a hurry.

Once you have presented your candidate(s). You now begin the arduous task of lining up interviews with your client and all their hiring managers. That’s right, there are almost always more than one person who wish to take part in the interview process. If you are working in the “executive placement” arena, hiring decisions in this arena are generally very deliberate. The interview process can range from a single group interview followed by the decision maker to a host of alternatives including what I refer to as “the gauntlet” style. This is where the hiring managers have the candidates going through a series of interviews back to back. This can take an entire day or can be spread over a period of time. This can be further complicated if travel is involved. This coordination can challenge the most organized individuals. Due to calendaring challenges, this can also drag the process out for months. This introduces another challenge called “keeping the candidate warm to the opportunity”. Briefly, this is the practice (art form really) of keeping interested candidates interested while the client gives due consideration to your candidate and/or quietly shops around. This is a very tricky thing to work through and can be quite time consuming.

If all goes well, your top candidate will have survived the interview process and will still be interested in the opportunity. If this is the case it will probably be time to take this to the next step. So, you must broach the topic of an offer with your client very much like the car salesman who says “What’s it going to take for me to get you in this car today?” That’s right, its time to play “let’s make a deal” Except the deal that you would desperately like to get done (so you can get paid) isn’t for you. Other people’s lives, careers and livelihoods are at stake. You can’t just take the money and run, you have to see to it that you get the best deal for both parties. There are many ways that this can take place and you can be asked to play many different roles during this difficult part of the transaction. This is another art form that must be mastered quickly. This part of the process can be quite exhilarating or quite exhausting, depending on how things are progressing. At times you can feel empowered and at other times quite helpless. Depending on the job title, responsibilities, role in the organization, geography, and

compensation structure this can be a very complicated and lengthy process. Regardless, you must always ensure that both parties are getting what they wish. Diplomacy is paramount and must be handled with honest yet tight gloves or your deal and the possibility of assisting both your client and candidate will be history. So, you do the best that you can with both sides and hope for the best. At the end of the day, both parties must be able to reach an accord or they probably shouldn't be working together anyway.

If you can get both parties to agree then comes that fateful day where the offer letter is put together, agreed upon and signed. This is always a great feeling, the culmination of many hours of hard work, hand holding, negotiations, diplomacy, exhaustion, and exhilaration finally coming to a close. The only trouble is that you're not finished yet. There are still a few things that can make this deal go awry. That's right, you're not quite done. As they say in the theater, "the fat lady hasn't sung yet". Your candidate must still give notice, unless he or she is not currently working. If notice must be given there is a good chance that the current employer may counter the pending offer. If this happens only once, it is still more than you would like. If you did your homework early in the process you would have fleshed this out to determine your candidate's true desires. Believe it or not, some people will use this painful process for their own intentions. If this is truly the case you must start over as your deal is now lying on the table and is DOA. If not, then you must work with your candidate as they go through the process of declining the counter offer and working through those dreaded last two weeks of employment. You must call this person routinely to ensure that they still intend to start on the agreed upon date and have not changed their mind. This period of time can be further complicated if there is a geographic relocation pending. There's no telling what the spouse is feeling at this point and who knows what the housing market is going to do. Trust me when I say, this can be a moderately stressful time for all parties concerned.

If everything stays on track, your candidate will start as expected. Your client will be thrilled and your candidate will be happy. You can generate that long awaited invoice and you can begin the process of following up with both parties to ensure the happiness of their new relationship. With any luck, you may even get another search assignment.

After completing my final thought, I watched as my ball gently turned toward the hole and disappeared for par. We finished our round with the usual couple of bucks changing hands and my friend looked at me. After listening to me rattle on for the entire round of golf he said "You never did tell me how you find people jobs." Well, my friend that is another practice known as "marketing candidates". That is a story for another day and another round of golf.