

Interviewing headhunted candidates

Headhunted candidates need to be 'sold' into a new job, while those responding to advertisements are the ones doing the selling.

In a recruitment drive a major telecommunications company made a total of eight offers to prospective candidates. Each of these candidates was identified in a search as having the right skills, experience and cultural match for the client, and the positions offered meant a career progression for the candidates. However, only four of the eight accepted the company's offer.

Had these positions been advertised all eight would most likely have been accepted by the chosen candidates.

This situation is not new, so what is it that separates the headhunted candidate from the person who responds to an advertised position?

Body Talk

When a candidate who responds to an advertised job walks through the door at the start of an interview, there is a fascinating exchange of non-verbal communication signals that takes place.

Trained interviewers are alert and observant, mentally sizing up the proposed candidate. Meanwhile, the interviewee is a little on edge, feels under intense scrutiny, but is eager to give positive signals. This is the scenario that most recruiting managers understand. What they often fail to recognize, however, is that this is not the normal situation when a headhunted candidate has been targeted and persuaded to attend an interview.

Generally speaking, these people will feel flattered at having been 'noticed' and selected. They will also be interested in what the recruiting company had to offer. However, they are most likely to be very settled in their current employment, and had probably not, until then, considered changing jobs. They feel very confidential that whichever way the interview goes, they are in a win-only situation and can please themselves whether or not to accept what's being offered.

Changing Jobs

On the other hand, the candidate who has answered advertisements is usually going to be very keen on changing jobs. They will want to make a positive impression and their

enthusiasm for the position offered will normally soar well above that of their headhunted counterpart. The latter may appear unenthusiastic and this can be frustrating to a recruiting manager who is looking to take on only the very best available talent.

The interview itself is a two way street. It's as much for the recruiting manager to find out everything that he or she needs to know about the candidate as it is the other way around.

Some managers have to realise that they must sell themselves to the candidate, and this is never more so than when a headhunted candidate turns up for an interview. It is a skill that is often lacking in some managers, with the result that excellent candidates slip through the net.

All too often, interviewers can find themselves in a situation where a headhunted candidate loses interest simply because he hasn't been 'turned on' by the interviewer. Questions such as; 'so what makes you think you are the right person for the job' go down like a lead balloon with headhunted candidates. After all, they were approached to attend the interview so they don't feel they have to justify themselves to anyone.

Selling the Job

The reason fewer positions are accepted by headhunted candidates is that they have not been 'sold' the job by the recruiting manager. Search consultants invest heavily in technology and search to identify and track the careers of top achievers, so will have done a lot to convince the headhunted candidate that the position being offered is an excellent career move.

Even though the consultant has laid the groundwork for the recruiting managers, it is now incumbent on them to 'wow' the candidate and this often doesn't materialise. It's the principal reason why more head hunted people turn jobs down more jobs than people who respond to advertised positions.

Recognising Differences

Recruiting can be a time-consuming and expensive exercise, so recognizing these differences will empower the interviewer to make the whole process work to greater benefit for their company.

The fact is that candidates for many positions, particularly at a senior management and board level, are far more effectively filled by searching for them rather than advertising the positions. As a result, managers do need to take on board what the recruitment consultants are saying about the marketplace, and hone their interviewing skills to suit the occasion. Thus, for recruitment consultants to open up a dialogue with their client along these lines will result in less frustration for all concerned – and a much higher strike rate.