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**SO YOU HAVE AN OPENING.**

There are basically three ways your company can fill it:

- 1) Word of mouth
- 2) Ads/job postings  
(usually through the Internet)
- 3) Engage an executive search firm.

All three methods can be effective, depending on the company, the position, the market and the company's urgency in filling the position.

First off, if the position is an inside sales representative or another at this level, an executive search firm may not be your best route. Either a local search firm specializing in clerical and administrative positions or an ad in your local paper or local job board can often be effective for a position at this level (results may vary based on the unemployment rate in your local area).

Word of mouth can be a useful tool in uncovering candidates. As our industry seems to get both larger and smaller with time, asking "Who do you know?" is also an effective way to fill some positions, particularly in a local market. The drawback is you mostly find people who are either actively looking or out of work, meaning you may miss the "best" candidate for the job.

Internet job postings and ads can often be an effective tool, as well. The Internet has in many instances essentially replaced the newspaper ad of days past. Most positions posted on Internet job boards will draw a large amount of responses. Some will be replying to your specific ad, and some may have put parameters in that job board site that will automatically send their resume to any job posting that meets certain parameters or word matches that the candidate specifies. Candidates out of work and available or those who are actively looking will even sometimes post their resumes on some job sites. Like the "word of mouth" method, this technique can be used at a relatively low cost.

**Recruiting Trip**

However, if the position is in sales, engineering, marketing, or a position in middle or upper man-

agement, your best bet may be to use a search firm. Think about it, would you attempt to defend yourself in a court of law? Administer your own diagnosis for an illness? Handle all your own accounting and tax issues directly? Most likely not. Then why tackle the critical task of hiring?

How do you find the right recruiting firm? Industry directories will often list search firms, but I recommend using personal recommendations. Talk to several business contemporaries whom you respect, and ask them for the names of two or three recruiters they have used or have heard good things about. Contact at least two or three. Part of a successful relationship with a recruiter is chemistry and work style, just as it is when you choose a doctor or an attorney.

Fees will vary as well as types of search—retained or contingency. But don't let price be your sole determining factor. While most established search firms in our industry work at somewhat similar (if not identical) rates, the cheapest is not always the best. Those firms with unusually cheap rates will not be providing the same sort of follow-up, services and/or ethical standards that others will. They simply can't afford to.

**Other Factors**

What follows are some other reasons why using a recruiter may make sense:

- *Even in a sluggish economy when employers may perceive that it's a "buyer's market" and they have the leverage, the best candidates, for the most part, are still employed.* While top performers can find themselves unemployed, it is usually for a very brief time. And keep in mind, when companies need to downsize, they don't release their top people—they let go marginal performers, the lesser contributors and/or the "problem" individuals.

Meanwhile, we often find candidates who take a position while out of work often stay at their new position for a shorter period than candidates who were currently

employed at the time. Why? Like the old country song says, "The girls all get prettier at closing time." While that song may not be politically correct, an analogy can be drawn. To a candidate out of work, your position may look much more inviting to than it would if he was currently employed. The danger to you, as an employer, is this: Is your potential employee interested in your company because he/she really sees the position as the next career step, or is it a "safe port in the storm"—a place to stay until the right opportunity comes along? On the other hand, employed candidates, though they may not be completely satisfied in their current positions, still are more likely to join your company because they want to, not because they *have* to. And there is the critical difference.

I often talk with companies who will find the person they thought was a "bargain"—completely available because they were unemployed at the time and very flexible on dollars—has suddenly left, or performed in a manner causing the employer to have to replace him/her. In short, the old axiom of "you get what you pay for" doesn't just apply to purchases you make. It also applies to employees you hire.

- *Searching job boards or reviewing countless e-mail replies to postings is not the best use of your (or your staff's) time.* Besides having to wade through the resumes of the unqualified, unhappy and/or unemployed, try calculating the actual time spent on reviewing/contacting/interviewing these candidates. This doesn't even take into account the cost of a hire of one of these candidates that doesn't pan out; the time spent looking for a replacement, the lack of productivity while the candidate was employed and the drain on your sales and/or profitability when the position is open *again*. Also, what are the projects you or your managers *could* be working on instead of opening endless attachments, usually of unqualified candidates? These are the hidden costs that quickly eat into your profits even while you think you are saving money by going it alone.

• *A recruiter knows the “players.”* A recruiter specializing in your industry will know “where the bodies are buried.” You may know or hear of candidates who are out of work, or are known to be “on the outs” with their current employers, but a good search firm with great contacts, and good knowledge about the lighting and electrical industry will know which candidates to contact who may not be known to be open or available. Like a combination of a detective and a matchmaker, the recruiter, through an often-exhaustive process, will determine a group of candidates from whom you can choose. And, most importantly, unlike job board candidates, where you find the best candidates *available* for your position, your search firm will show you the best candidates *qualified* for your position.

• *A recruiter can more easily contact a variety of candidates whom you may not feel comfortable going after.* For example, a recruiting firm, because it’s a “third party,” can easily and discreetly contact candidates working for some of your direct competitors. If your firm contacts your direct competitor, it is more likely to leak out. Plus, we have heard stories of one company recruiting directly from a competitor, which causes the competitor to do the same thing in retaliation, causing an exodus of people back and forth.

• *Because it’s a third party, a recruiting firm can probe into issues a candidate may have along the way—issues he may not share with you, his prospective employer.* And if a candidate has a concern(s), wouldn’t you rather hear about them early on when you have a chance to counter or overcome those concerns, rather after the candidate has turned down your position?

• *A search firm can expedite salary negotiations.* The recruiter can help by working with both parties right after the first interview, getting a sense of the salary parameters as well as candidate expectations. And, no, this doesn’t mean that the recruiter will try and get the maximum amount of dollars for the candidate, thus increasing his/her fee.

Your search firm won’t talk with you to make sure the offer you might extend is appropriate, but it will work with a candidate to make sure her salary expectations are realistic. We find if candidate and company really want each other, dollars rarely get in the way (provided that the necessary “due diligence” is done by your recruiter to make sure candidate expectations are within your salary range).

• *A good recruiting firm will prepare a candidate before she or he gives notice, and follow up with the candidate (and you) during the critical period between offer acceptance and start date.* Your recruiter should also caution your employee-to-be (before or at least at the time they accept your offer) on the dangers and pitfalls of entertaining a counter offer. (See “Careers & Hiring” LD+A October 2003).

• *A recruiter will follow-up after the hire.* Not unlike a marriage, the first few weeks (and sometimes months) are an adjustment period for both parties—again, it is a new relationship. And having an intermediary to whom you can discreetly share any minor concerns gives both those parties a chance to more smoothly and easily resolve issues as they continue to cement their own relationship. Plus, we find a new employee still loves to hear (third-person) feedback on how he/she is doing with his/her new job, so giving that feedback to your recruiter can be very beneficial.

*Have a question about hiring, interviewing, performance evaluations, the job market? We’ll select some of the best questions to answer in our next column in August LD+A. Send your question to [paul@pompeo.com](mailto:paul@pompeo.com). Your name and company will not be used.*

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