TOP 10 MISTAKES EXECUTIVES MAKE IN CHOOSING RECRUITERS



Over the years, we've heard a lot of frustrations from our clients regarding recruiters. Many of them indicated that using a recruiter feels like throwing money down the drain.

Many of the frustrations executives experience with recruiters stem from initial mistakes in hiring the recruiter.

We undertook an in-depth survey project conducted over a 3-year period with 425 CEOs and senior executives. Impact Hiring Solutions examined the top 10 mistakes and false assumptions in working with recruiters.

Some of the Top 10 Mistakes in Choosing Recruiters will give you a good chuckle - particularly if you've personally fallen victim to one of these common mistakes.

At a core level, the primary reason most recruiters fail in search assignments is that they have no systematic structured approach to finding, assessing, and recruiting top talent. The next time you interview an executive recruiter for a critical search, ask them to specifically describe their process for conducting a search. Use the 8 Steps of the Success Factor Methodology as a

benchmark to determine if they can fulfill your needs or if the outcome will be dependent on luck.

Recruiter Benchmarking

Upon completing the survey project, we created a Recruiter Benchmarking Tool based on our Success Matrix and customized it as an assessment tool for evaluating recruiters. We offer a FREE Recruiter Benchmarking Service under our FREE Resources menu.

Mistake #1: All Recruiters Have a Rigorous Process

CEOs and senior executives in our survey assumed that all retained executive recruiters must have a rigorous process to help clients hire key executives that will deliver expected results. After all, if you visit the recruiter's website, doesn't it always identify that the recruiter has a process to conduct the search? This assumption represents the number one mistake that is made in working with recruiters. Falling victim to this mistake results in searches that do not get filled in a timely manner, do not get filled with a top caliber candidate, or do not get filled at all. Industry statistics show that less than 65% of all executive searches are completed by the search firm. The Success Factor Methodology is a process that overcomes the #1 mistake when it is used both by the recruiter and by the company.

Mistake #2: Recruiter must be a Functional or Industry Expert

Survey participants who retained executive search firms that fell short of the finish line identified their initial criteria in choosing a recruiter was to pick a recruiter based on their experience in doing search work for a functional position (such as a CFO or Director of Manufacturing), or a specific industry (such as aerospace fasteners or Internet services.) The assumption that recruiters can only be successful if they have a specific functional or industry experience is misleading. Just because you can check the boxes on a recruiter's background, experience, and industry knowledge, does not mean they can deliver the results you need on a search assignment. The very best retained recruiters are outstanding at recruiting and convincing top talent to raise their hand to learn more about a compelling opportunity. The very best recruiters can recruit great talent in any industry. Having industry expertise and a rolodex does not lead to consistent results. Many recruiters claiming industry and functional expertise not only tend to fall into the box-checking category of only looking at aggressive candidates, but also tend to fish in very shallow waters (see Mistake #4).

Mistake #3: Recruiter must be Within Close Proximity

The participants in our survey could not identify any difference in performance among selecting search firms geographically close or on the other side of the country. There appears to be no correlation to the successful outcome of an executive search based on geographic

proximity. Technology has created a monumental shift within the retained search field over the last decade. The Internet has changed the playing field so that an executive search firm in Chicago working on an assignment in Rochester can be just as effective as a local firm down the street from the client. The Internet has replaced the traditional search firm golden Rolodex that existed pre-Internet. Within 48-72 hours, any recruiter using the Internet can find the names of targeted candidates to recruit. Most local recruiters only know the candidates aggressively looking for a new job. Very few recruiters understand the process of deep sourcing to find the best talent and possess the skills necessary to recruit reluctant, happy, content talent in other companies. Similar to the mistake of only looking at functional or industry expertise, using the criteria of picking a search firm based on geographic proximity is misleading. Just because the search firm is 2 miles away, doesn't mean they have a rigorous process for identifying, assessing, and convincing top talent to come and work in your organization.

Mistake #4: All Recruiters Fish in the Deep End of the Pond

Our survey participants were consistently frustrated by the average and mediocre candidates brought forth on search assignments. Many participants felt they could have run an Internet advertisement and pulled the same group of candidates. Many times our participants would ask a candidate presented by the search firm how the search firm found them. A large percentage of candidates would respond that the recruiter ran an ad and the candidate answered it. Recruiters also had a tendency to present candidates who had been out of work for quite some time and appeared desperate to the hiring manager to just get a job. Our participants concluded that most recruiters fish in the shallow end of the pond by running ads, making a few referral calls, and looking in their database of aggressive candidates. One of the participants in our study called this syndrome "The best of the worst". Another used a more colorful phrase calling it "Presenting the cream of the crap". The Success Factor Methodology uses an approach that gets directly at candidate motivation to drive top talent to raise their hand to want to learn more about the opportunity.

Mistake #5: All Recruiters Help a Client Define a Great Job

Participants in our study had contracted with executive search firms assuming they would help in effectively defining the position. They politely described most recruiters' efforts in this area as a re-write of their internal job descriptions. They found that the recruiters they've retained took their original two page job descriptions, added 4-6 pages of boiler-plate information, and had the audacity to claim a portion of their fees were based on this "value-added" service. When both the recruiter and the executive use the Success Factor Snapshot as the primary tool to guide the search project, accuracy and success soars like an eagle on a consistent basis.

Mistake #6: All Recruiters Do a Good Job of Assessing Candidates

Our participants were under whelmed by their executive recruiters' ability to conduct an effective interview. Our participants found that they still had to conduct initial screens and catch the glaring errors and omissions ignored by recruiters. Our participants were stunned to find that most recruiters haven't the slightest clue how to deeply evaluate a candidate. The vast majority of recruiters conduct meet-and-greet sessions with candidates in an attempt to determine if the

candidate can interview effectively. Forget about determining if the candidate can do the job. Most recruiters are simply measuring likeability. A recruiter who uses a structured approach, such as our 5 Core-Question Interview and the Magnifying Glass Approach to Interviewing, overcomes this fundamental mistake.

Mistake #7: Recruiter's Value is based on Showing Candidates

Study participants recognized that assuming the fee paid for an executive search was directly correlated to the presentation of candidates was a major mistake. The investment in search fees for most companies is a major expenditure. When this expenditure turns into nothing more than a high-priced resume service, there is likely to be significant disappointment in the value perception, even if one of the resumes presented turns into the candidate who gets hired. Top recruiting professionals have a rigorous and systematic business process for hiring, such as the Success Factor Methodology, which encompasses a cradle-to-grave process to raise hiring accuracy from historical standards close to 50% well up into the 90% range. Since most recruiters lack a rigorous process, our participants felt that there was a significant gap of value received.

Mistake #8: All Recruiters Have a Consultative Approach

One of the major mistakes in paying fees to recruiters is the assumption that the recruiter has a trusted advisor perspective to helping you make hires that are successful over the long term. Executives participating in our study realized that many recruiters have their own hidden agendas and short-term interests in mind when doing work for you. These can include the need to earn their fee quickly, identifying candidates with the least amount of effort, hiding negative information about the candidate, forcing a match when there is a dramatic mismatch, and overselling to close a deal that had no right to be made in the first place. The very best recruiters act as trusted advisors. They define a clear and precise process to identify and hire the talent you need. They force fierce discussions of candidate performance and fit, frequently playing devil’s advocate against your assumptions. Top talent in the recruiting field pressure their clients relentlessly to follow their rigorous process and focus on validating, vetting, and verifying candidate claims of performance and work style. They work diligently to ensure you are hiring the very best person for your open role.

Mistake #9: A National Firm is required for an Effective Search

The executives in our study realized that choosing a national firm to conduct a search was not a guarantee of success. Issues mentioned during our survey included having the partner sell the search only to turn it over to a junior associate, not providing adequate communication, being treated as just one of many searches being conducted simultaneously, a lack of responsiveness, and once the internal budget for the project was hit, the national firm stopped working on the project. Most shocking of all, was the refusal of national search firms to take responsibility for assessing the candidate. The vast majority of national search firms portray their business model as one of just showing candidates and then demanding a referral fee for the presentation of a candidate. These firms did not conduct deep and insightful interviews, did not understand how to measure success, and were unwilling to join their clients during the interview process. Even when search fees range between $50K and $100K, this represents nothing more than a glorified resume service. The national search firms engaged by our survey

participants lacked a rigorous process for finding and assessing talent, on top of the resistance to fish deeply for talent due to profit needs. Just because the firm has a national brand and many offices does not translate into success on search assignments.

Mistake #10: All Recruiters Know How to Recruit Top Talent

Another major mistake that occurs during the selection of a search firm is the assumption that all recruiters are outstanding at recruiting, motivating, and nurturing the selective and sleeper candidates from the deep end of the pond. Our participants were frequently disappointed that the search firms they engaged were unable to attract and interest selective and sleeper candidates. They realized that most recruiters took the easy road of fishing in the shallow end of the pool, where the candidates are desperate for work and don't need to be recruited. The very best recruiters understand candidate motivation at a deep level and are able to craft compelling statements of work that appeal to the primary motivators of top talent. The Success Factor Snapshot and the Compelling Marketing Statement provide tools for top-notch recruiters to demonstrate to a high potential candidate what they will learn, what impact they will have in the organization, and what they will become for being in this new role. The very best recruiters consistently recruit, excite, and close selective and sleeper candidates.