

# **Working With Executive Recruiters**

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Let's make one thing clear right from the start - executive search firms, recruiters, and employment agencies are not in business to help you land a job. The recruiter is not your advocate, your friend, or your agent. Recruiters, employment agencies, and search firms are merely channels through which you may secure an opportunity for an interview!

Contrary to popular belief, most executive recruiters do not "hold onto" your resume, look for opportunities that will suit you, and eventually contact you when they find a "perfect match." The process is much more immediate and transactional than that. If you happen to send your resume to a recruiter right at the time that they're conducting a search for someone just like you, then you're in luck and you might get an interview! But if the recruiter does not have an "open order" appropriate to your background at the time when he or she receives your resume, you'll usually be treated almost like you were "invisible" - and your resume will tend to "disappear." Unfortunately, you are not the most important thing on the recruiter's mind, which is why it's wise to contact your search firms periodically to "check in."

When recruiters ignore you or reject you, don't take it personally! This is just the way the business works, and it's no reflection on you or your qualifications. I have worked with too many clients who get despondent when they don't hear back from executive recruiters. It's vitally important that you do not get "emotionally attached" to any recruiter, job opening, or prospective employer.

On the positive side, recruiters and search firms can be quite helpful in your job search, as long as you know how to manage the process! But again, never forget that they work for the organizations that pay them to find candidates - not for you.

In order to gain the most benefit from working with executive search firms, you must first understand the different types of organizations in the search industry:

## **Placement Agencies that Charge you a Fee**

These agencies should be avoided completely. They collect a fee from you, the jobseeker, presumably in exchange for arranging the entire placement process with potential employers. They generally handle lower-level jobs.

Many people have been "burned" by these types of agencies that charge you a fee, losing up to thousands of dollars. These types of companies prey on desperate job-seekers who have little or no other information at their disposal. So, always be sure to read any agreements before signing anything.

## **Contingency-Fee Recruiters**

Contingency Recruiters tend to handle the low-to-mid level opportunities, with salaries generally below \$75,000. They are paid a percentage of the candidate's salary - but only if they actually place a candidate. They are generally not paid anything unless a position is filled, and thus their primary business strategy is volume - to handle many assignments, refer as many candidates as possible to potential employers, and place as many people as they can in jobs. Think of contingency recruiters as working "strictly on commission," and competing directly with other contingency recruiters who are trying to fill the same spots. Therefore, contingency recruiters usually will not work closely with you to ensure the job is the best possible fit for you.

You must take full responsibility for judging, filtering, and sorting the opportunities suggested by contingency recruiters.

## **Retained Executive Search Firms**

Retained Executive Search Firms tend to handle the higher-level executive opportunities, with salaries between \$75,000 and \$500,000 or more. These are the classic "headhunters," who are granted an exclusive right to conduct a search on behalf of their client company and are paid their fee (or at least some of it) even if the search is unsuccessful. They are called "retained" because they work on retainer, much like a management consulting firm. Executive Search Consultants usually receive between 20% and 33% of the candidate's first year's salary. These types of Search Consultants generally play a more active and selective role in helping to frame job requirements, pre-screen candidates, conduct background and reference checks, and facilitate negotiations. They work very closely with the senior management over a period of years, getting to know the culture, preferences and staffing needs of their client companies.

It is in the retained search firm's best interests to make sure a candidate really is an excellent fit for the industry, the company, and the specific position - because successful placements ensure that the firm will get additional search contracts from the same employer.

## **General Guidelines**

When working with any type of executive search firm or recruiter, you must maintain control of them and their activities. In fact, even though the search firm is not working for you, I tell my clients to "supervise" the work of recruiters as though they were managing a group of employees. This means following some important guidelines:

- Be careful and selective in choosing which recruiters you want to work with, and politely decline to work with those who don't appeal to you or are inappropriate for your situation.
- The best resource for finding and selecting search firms is the Directory of Executive Recruiters, published by Kennedy Information (kennedyinformation.com). This book is also available at many large libraries.
- When speaking with your search firms, be totally honest and direct about your job objectives, past compensation, desired salary, geographical preferences and other details.
- Never pay any sort of "registration fee" or any other money - for anything! All the search firm's fees should be paid by the employer.
- When interviewing, make sure that the job is exactly what the recruiter described. Confirm (and re-confirm, if necessary) the important job details, responsibilities, and compensation.
- Remember that you are the source of the recruiter's income (indirectly). You are entitled to courtesy and respect, as well as honest and prompt answers to your questions.
- Do not sign any contract or make any agreement that obligates you to work exclusively with one agency, or that requires you to pay any fee. Have all forms from the search firms reviewed by an employment attorney.
- Ask that your resume and other information not be forwarded to any prospective employer without your prior approval.
- Be sure that the recruiter does not edit your resume or any other documents without your permission.
- Work closely only with a handful of carefully selected search firms, not an unlimited number of agencies.
- At the point of negotiating your compensation for a new position, do not rely on the recruiter. You must either conduct the negotiations yourself, or at least be actively involved in the negotiation process.
- Focus only 5% or 10% of your job-search energies on recruiters. Remember that most of your time should be spent on more productive activities, such as professional networking.

Some Executive Search Consultants will also provide vital information about such things as industry conditions and local business trends, as well as insightful feedback about your campaign strategy, your compensation level, etc. However, never confuse Executive Search Consultants with Career Consultants - they play very different roles.

Large, national search firms may have offices in many cities, and these offices generally share online resources. If you get into their database in one office, your profile will come-up in another city's database if an opportunity arises that matches your credentials. This may be helpful if you are willing to relocate. Smaller search firms may also have excellent reputations in their own

geographical areas, and certainly should not be overlooked.

If you have a basic understanding of how the search industry works, and follow the guidelines above, you will find that search firms and recruiters can serve an important role in your successful job search or career transition!

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