



Seven Questions You Should Ask Before Spending a Dime with a Recruiter

By Dixie Agostino

A man walks into a hardware store to buy a hammer. What does he want?

Most of us would think this is either a set up for a corner joke or a trick question. Of course he wants a hammer! But when we go a little deeper, that's not the case and that is the same scenario we find ourselves in when we are looking to hire.

The man doesn't want the hammer so much as he wants the nail in the wall. And does he really want the nail in the wall or does he want to hang a picture for his wife? And what does he get out of hanging the picture for his wife? He gets her love, appreciation and hopefully a continuously successful marriage. So, do we really want a customer service representative with seven years of experience as a CSR or do we want a reliable employee who can deliver a positive experience to our customers?

The first thing we should ask before enlisting the help of an outside recruiter or before employing our internal recruiting resources is this:

1. WHAT RESULTS DO WE WANT TO GET OUT OF THIS POSITION?

This question sets the stage for our sourcing, recruiting and screening criteria. As a recruiter for many years, every day I see job descriptions that look like this:

Piping Designer Requirements:

- *Associate degree in Drafting Technology*
- *Minimum 7 years of design experience*
- *Strong analytical and problem solving skills*
- *Strong CAD skills with CadWorx*
- *Familiarity with standard piping design practices*
- *Strong MS Office skills, especially Excel and Outlook*

Let's take this requirement list apart.

- *Associate degree in Drafting Technology*

When I ask hiring managers if they would consider candidates who could perform all of the necessary job functions but did not have a degree, almost every one of them says they would. But the information passed to HR and recruiters is that a degree is required, so candidates that excel at piping design and have years of experience could easily be overlooked or rejected.

- *Minimum 7 years of design experience*

Does my hiring manager want someone who has seven years of experience or would they rather have someone who has learned very fast, been able to glean information from mentors and shown themselves to be a high achiever. Many managers think that years of experience equal a certain level of competence but for top performers, they shortcut that process by learning faster and accelerating by tackling big projects. For example, who would you want to hire? A.) An Account Manager who has been in their role for seven years or B.) An Account Manager who had been in the role for

two years, has now been promoted to Senior Account Manager, won Top Producer of the Year and is now considered one of the strongest sales representatives in the department?

- *Strong CAD skills with CadWorx*

Again, let's boil down. Does the person in this role HAVE to know this software program or do they just need to be highly proficient in 3D design? Granted, this approach doesn't work for every single position but it does work for most. What the Drafting Manager who is looking for this Piping Designer wants is NOT seven years of design experience. What they want is someone who can design a \$200MM cryogenics plant in time to meet the client's deadline.

Think about it. Does the HR Generalist you are looking for **HAVE** to have experience with ADP payroll? Or do they just need to have an understanding of payroll software and the ability to learn your company's specific way of running payroll?

The second question we need to ask is:

2. WHAT ARE THE SKILLS THAT ARE ABSOLUTELY REQUIRED TO ACCOMPLISH THESE RESULTS?

To know these skills, we have to have a clear understanding of the daily tasks of the position as well as the metrics used to judge success in this role. If the position is responsible for leading the successful completion of month end financials, then an accounting background with experience in financial reporting is imperative. If success in the position looks like booking seven sales presentations a week, then the ability to get on the phone and ask for an appointment is a stronger job requirement than a marketing or business administration degree would be.

Having a clear view of what needs to be done sets the stage for the next question

3. WHAT IS THE BEST APPROACH TO FINDING PEOPLE WITH THIS SKILL SET?

For entry level and more general positions, job board postings, social media and your own company website may be the best option. For jobs that require a specific culture fit, utilizing a strong employee referral program will usually deliver the best results. For high impact, technical or management roles, utilizing a strong recruiting partner will deliver the best results in the fastest amount of time.

Let's break this down into metrics by listing the last ten positions your company has filled. Let's chart this out. Doing so will give us a visual representation of several metrics that will help us learn if we are really being successful, which are 1.) Time To Fill, 2.) Employee Retention and 3.) Candidate Success

Hiring Metrics Chart

| Job title | Open Date | Filled Date | Source | Candidate's Performance |
|------------------------|-----------|-------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Accountant | 9/31/13 | 4/13/2014 | Website Application | Still in ramp up phase |
| 2. Sales Manager | 10/1/2013 | 2/3/2014 | Outside Recruiter/Agency A | Candidate left within 90 days |
| 3. Industrial Engineer | 7/22/2013 | 5/5/2014 | Internal Hire | Still in ramp up phase |
| 4. Office Manager | 1/1/2014 | 1/28/2014 | Outside Recruiter/Agency B | "A" Performer |
| 5 | | | | |
| 6 | | | | |
| 7 | | | | |
| 8 | | | | |
| 9 | | | | |
| 10 | | | | |

From this information we can learn a lot. In Job #1, the Accountant was open for six months before a qualified candidate came along. What was the cost to the company and that department particularly in leaving that position open so long? Did it create additional stress for the people in that department, performing their job plus functions of another? Did good people leave because they didn't feel there was a light at the end of the tunnel? Where would the department have been had they had a person in that role six months earlier and where would that candidate have been in their level of proficiency with six months more lead time in learning the company's procedures, policies and culture?

In Job #2, after a four month search, the candidate was not retained. Did the recruiting agency replace the candidate? What was the reason for departure? Was a complete exit interview done to learn what could be improved in the next hiring process? What can be learned from the experience?

In Job #3, the position was open for ten months before an internal candidate was discovered. Why was the position left open so long? What changed for the candidate over the course of those ten months to make them a fit or did we as hiring managers miss great talent initially? Where would the production floor be if there had been an industrial engineer ten months ago to reduce costs and find efficiencies? What was the cost of leaving that position open?

In Job #4, an outside recruiting firm was used, results delivered in less than a month and the candidate is still retained and performing well. What was the process used to select the firm? What was the experience during the hiring process? And how do we know that our former candidate and current Office Manager is an "A" candidate?

Once you have an understanding of the success or failure of your current strategy, you decide if your internal resources are powerful enough or if you need some experts in the field

4. DO WE NEED TO ENLIST AN OUTSIDE RECRUITER?

No. Did that surprise you? If your company has successfully filled the needs that you have in a timely fashion, with people who stayed with the company for an acceptable duration and who are performing well in their roles, you have a solid recruitment strategy.

However, if you are seeing the following, the answer is YES:

- A. Job openings that stay open indefinitely. This is a sign of either two things. There is either no commitment to filling the position, which means the position is likely not needed. Or that the requirements for the position are unrealistic and need to be reviewed.
- B. Candidates that don't stay with the company. When there is turnover, either there is a lack of skills or a lack of culture fit. In either case, there is a problem with the screening and hiring process which is failing to discover these mismatches.
- C. Candidates that don't perform. Filling positions quickly with candidates that stay is a pointless endeavor if the candidates in those roles don't perform the necessary results. More importantly, do you want average performers or top level performers in your key roles?

Once you know that you need expert help, now the step is finding it.

5. HOW DO WE FIND A "GOOD" RECRUITING FIRM?

Recruiting is much like matchmaking, it is important to find someone who really "gets" your company, understands your needs and can also provide you with the information you need to make an accurate decision. Much like you would utilize your trusted contacts to find a lawyer, doctor or another expert professional or would use your professional network to fill a key role within your company or department, put that network to work for the position of Recruiting Partner.

The book "From Good To Great" by Jim Collins talks about the difference in companies that are good versus companies that are great. It's pretty easy to find a good restaurant, but when was the last time you went to a GREAT restaurant, one that impressed you on all points of food, service and atmosphere? Would you want a good tax accountant or a great one?

The Pareto principle (also known as the 80–20 rule) states that for many events, roughly 80% of the effects come from 20% of the causes. For example:

- 80% of a company's profits come from 20% of its customers
- 80% of a company's complaints come from 20% of its customers
- 80% of a company's profits come from 20% of the time its staff spend
- 80% of a company's sales come from 20% of its products
- 80% of a company's sales are made by 20% of its sales staff

Likewise, a great recruiter understands that it is their job to source, evaluate and maximize those key performers who are in the top 20% of their fields, delivering the 80% of results AND who have valid reasons for making a change. Great recruiters live by their reputations. They have a history of long-term sustained performance. They are required to deliver accurate matches on a time line and to do that must be constantly recruiting passive candidates and learning more about their industry.

Signs of a GREAT Recruiter

- They have a complete LinkedIn profile, tons of contacts and recommendations.
- They can provide references for their work
- They understand and specialize in your specific industry and have successfully placed candidates in the types of positions you need to fill.
- They ask questions that make you think and can share advice, market knowledge and best practices
- They get a deep understanding of the company, culture and position.
- They do what they say they will. They arrive to the meeting on time, they call on time and they deliver the promised results on time.
- They will be honest and let you know if they can't work on a specific position

6. WHAT QUESTIONS DO I ASK WHEN SCREENING RECRUITING AGENCIES?

Q What screening techniques does the recruiter use when selecting candidates to submit to vacancies?

A great recruiter meets candidates in person whenever possible, has checked multiple references and really understands the candidate's genuine reasons for leaving. They also know in depth reasons why the candidate will be a fit for the role and examples of prior related successes and has a good feel for the personality fit. That being said, for relocation candidates an in-person is not always feasible but with Skype and FaceTime, there are still viable alternatives. Never ever enlist a recruiter who has not fully interviewed the candidates they represent.

Q How many resumes will the recruiter send us per position?

A great recruiter will screen through maybe a hundred resumes to thoroughly vet between six and ten top candidates and present between one and three of the very best. Some managers feel they want to see a certain number of candidates before deciding who to interview. But why would you want to interview six people when you could interview one right person? If your team needs to see a set number of people before they can make a hiring decision, it is likely that your hiring team is trying to pick "the best of what's presented" instead of hiring the person who can do the job. In this case, the requirements for the job need to be more fully realized so that when a highly qualified candidate is presented, your team doesn't miss out on them by using a long, drawn out hiring process.

Q How can the recruiter prove their success?

A great recruiter can provide references and had raving fans that are happy to vouch for them. Ask the recruiter about vacancies they have previously dealt with to establish their ability to recruit and understand the role. If a recruiter cannot provide references, testimonials or tell you the companies they have worked with in the past, this is a huge red flag.

Q What are the recruiter's fees?

Evidence has shown you get what you pay for. When it comes to top performers, it is a matter of value over price. Yes, you may be looking at paying 33% of a candidate's first year annual compensation, but if that is a candidate that can save your company \$2MM in a worker's compensation lawsuit or sell a \$200MM project, then their fee has one of the best returns on investment in the market. There are few other opportunities to make between 15 and 100 time your investment back within the first year and that is more than possible when you hire a top performer. Then establish on the outset the fees and rebate if the consultancy offers a money back guarantee

Q Is this recruiter certified?

Most great recruiters are certified by the National Association of Personnel Services (NAPS), the American Staffing Association (ASA), AIRS® or have a human resources certification from the Human Resources Certification Institute (HRCI). This can help assure you that the recruiter you are working with is up to date with current legislation and has the skills needed for a strong recruiter. Still, trust your judgment and intuition over a certification. No matter how certified a Recruiting Partner is, it has to be someone who will work well with your company's culture and hiring teams.

OH, but WAIT! **Why select just one?** Recruiters are calling me every day, shouldn't I just use all of them to get all the good candidates?

Have you ever been watching a show and the same commercial keeps popping up again and again and again? Does that make you more likely to buy the product or less? But selecting several recruiters you now have several things to manage:

- A. Multiple recruiters inevitably calling the same candidates, destroying the perception of your company as a premier place to work. Now it seems that your company is desperate for employee and has "released the dogs" on anyone who might be a fit.
- B. Tracking which recruiter sent what candidates.
- C. Ensuring multiple recruiters are sending the message about your company that you want sent out to the labor market. Are the recruiters you are using sharing your core values? Are they acting as advocates and consistent examples of the level of professionalism your company wants in their employees?
- D. Getting results on a deadline. Few great recruiters will commit to working on a project when they know every other recruiter in town is also looking at it. When multiple recruiters are working on a position, they know their individual chance of success is low. This discourages all the recruiters from prioritizing your needs.

Once you have selected a Recruiting Partner, just like any employee or vendor relationship, feedback is key.

7. HOW DO I MEASURE THE RESULTS?

William Edwards Deming who launched the Total Quality Management movement was credited with the saying "You can expect what you inspect." Periodically hold your Recruiting Partner up to the same Hiring Metrics chart or to the same standards you hold your internal recruiting tools and see how they stand up. A truly great Recruiting Partner will be well worth their fees.