



## Working with Headhunters

*Question:* What should I be aware of when I work with headhunters?

*Answer:* Working with headhunters can be tricky. Some are honest, and some are not. Some have the best interests of candidates and their clients at heart, and others do not. This should not deter you from using the services of a recruiter. Knowing what to expect from a good recruiter and knowing the warning signs of a less-than-scrupulous headhunter can make the experience of working with one more rewarding, whether you are a potential client or a candidate. However, understand that all headhunters are sales people, and good ones are trained to get what they want, quickly. What they want is a placement, and of course, their fee.

Therefore, I always tell companies that when they are dealing with headhunters to set ground rules. And those rules are:

- Get everything in writing and don't accept a resume until you see the details of the fees, guaranties, etc. in writing.
  - Not all hires are good. Be sure there is a guarantee period that is at least 3 months.
  - Make sure that the fee is on base salary, not total compensation. You don't want to pay a fee on bonuses, commissions, and the like.
  - What is the candidate screening process. Do they meet the candidates or do they just do phone screens?
  - What are the payment terms? Is money due up front or when you hire someone?
- Recruiters work on both contingency (you pay when they find someone), and retainer (you pay up-front and as you go along). There really isn't a preferred method. More experienced headhunters (like the author of this article), or executive search companies, will only work on retainer, they want to know that the client is committed before they start a search. That doesn't mean that inexperienced recruiters work on contingency, many are simply more comfortable with a contingency arrangement.
- Don't accept resumes from headhunters whom you do not have an agreement with, and let all your managers know. Be aware that in the United States it is not legal for anyone to send an unsolicited fax. Therefore, if you receive solicitations from headhunters via facsimile, send it back.

Many headhunters will not disclose the names of their clients to candidates. They do that for several reasons:

- The client doesn't want people knowing who they are.
- The client doesn't want candidates calling them directly.
- The headhunter does not want you calling the client, and going around them.
- The headhunter does not want word to get out that the company has an opening, thereby increasing the chance that the client getting a sales call from another recruiter.
- The position isn't real.

Therefore candidates must keep the following in mind:

- Know who the headhunter is working for. People work for the person who pays the bills, and that is not the candidates. NEVER FORGET THIS RULE.
- Some headhunters send resumes to all their clients and don't even tell the candidates where they went. Ask yourself, "Do I want to be some resume or an individual?" Most people want to be an individual and be seen as someone with value. Therefore, always know where your resume is going and why.
- If you are not interested in the position, don't send your resume. However, don't be too selective and picky, or the recruiter will stop calling you.
- Good headhunters will not just send your resume. They want you to buy in before it is sent to a client. They want to ensure that when the client says schedule this person for an interview, you, as the candidate, are sold.
- Good headhunters know how to screen a candidate well so that they only send a client people they want to see. What does that mean? There really aren't a lot of good headhunters. But since there are a lot of headhunters, it serves you well keep looking for a good one, and only give your resume to those you trust.

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