

## **Recruiters of Today – Stop Telling & Start Selling!**

As I travel the country speaking with Human Resources Departments, Talent Acquisition Groups and Third Party Recruiters, I am asked the same question – what makes a great recruiter? Before we can answer this question let's take a look at how the role of the typical recruiter has changed so we can better understand the function of the ideal recruiter.

Throughout the 80's and 90's and into the beginning of this decade, recruiters were predominately charged with reviewing resumes that magically appeared on their desks. Whether they posted a print ad, or leveraged tools such as Monster.com and Careerbuilder.com, recruiters for many years seemed to have an overabundance of applicants applying to open requisitions. The recruiter's main focus was to „filter out“ those applicants that did not meet their minimum qualifications and then arrange for potential candidates to meet with the hiring manager. Thus a recruiter of the past was seen as an administrative staffer with the responsibility of ensuring that a certain number of transactions were performed monthly (interviews, background checks, etc).

Let's face it, the rules of engagement for recruiters today has changed. Baby boomers, which make up 32% of the workforce, are beginning to retire. The replacement generations have fewer total numbers creating large gaps, and today's millenials site quality-of-life as more important than cash and position status. These changes are making it much harder for organizations to attract the right talent to fill their open positions.

In order to combat these issues, companies spend millions of dollars annually to provide their recruiters with access to the population of candidates they need to effectively fill their positions. Professional networking sites such as LinkedIn and Plaxo are growing at record numbers, social networking sites such as Facebook.com have more than 70 million unique monthly visitors, and the dollars spent on training recruiters on new sourcing tools and techniques increases daily.

The reality is that all of these wonderful and effective tools being used are rendered useless unless the role of the recruiter is clearly defined in light of the changes in demographics, economics, and generational differences today. The „transactional“ recruiter of the past does not possess the skills or training necessary to move into the role of the recruiter today. Candidates are consumers, they have many options when changing jobs and will ultimately choose the role that they believe best fits their desires – they are „sold“ on a particular position within a particular company.

If candidates must be sold, recruiters must be selling! This is a simple yet often avoided concept in recruiting today. Most job descriptions for recruiters hardly even mention the words sales, prospecting, or closing.

Wikipedia.com states that *“The primary function of professional sales is to generate and close leads, educate prospects, fill needs and satisfy wants of consumers appropriately, and therefore turn prospective customers into actual ones. The successful questioning to understand a customer’s goal, the further creation of a valuable solution by communicating the necessary information that encourages a buyer to achieve their goal at an economic cost is the responsibility of the salesperson or the sales engine”*.

Let’s break this definition down to determine if the role of a recruiter meets the role of a professional sales person:

Generate and close leads – as stated earlier, companies spend millions of dollars providing recruiters with tools and methods to source or „identify“ contacts that may become candidates.

Fill needs and satisfy wants of the consumer appropriately – in order to be successful recruiters in today’s environment, recruiters MUST fill the identified needs and wants of a candidate in order to successfully recruit them to their organization. REMEMBER – Candidates buy emotionally and justify rationally! Turn prospective customers into actual ones – recruiters are charged with taking prospective candidates and turning them into actual employees.

The successful questioning to understand a customer’s goal, the further creation of a valuable solution...is the responsibility of the sales person – recruiters must be able to ask potential candidates the right questions to determine the potential needs of the candidate in order to present a position that fulfills those needs.

The question still remains: What makes a great recruiter? The definition above obviously indicates that a great recruiter should have the same skill sets and qualifications of a great sales person! The key to exceptional recruiting is mastering the steps that are critical in every sales process. All of the great sales visionaries including Zig Ziglar and Tom Hopkins have taught these steps to sales professionals around the world through their books, tapes and seminars yet few recruiters today understand or utilize any of these available resources.

So much emphasis has been placed on prospecting or sourcing potential candidates that recruiters are not taught the basics of the sales process that follows the sourcing function. Having listened to thousands of third party and corporate recruiters over the past 15 years, it is evident that less than 10% of recruiters understand basic sales principals.

Although the terminology may differ, following are the key steps critical to every successful sales professional or recruiting professional.

1. **Developing the Relationship** – This is the time that the warming-up events occur before the serious selling begins. This includes things such as how you introduce yourself and how you begin the conversation. Candidates have stated that it's during the first 2 minutes of the call they form crucial initial impressions that influence the rest of the recruiting process.
2. **Creating/Identifying the Need** – Every sale involves identifying a need that the candidate is often unaware of by asking questions. This is much more than a simple collection of data. Identifying or creating the need is the most important of all selling and recruiting skills. Recruiters who are the most effective during this investigative stage are most likely to be the highest performers and recruiters with poor investigative skills generally create candidates that ultimately do not accept the position once offered. Studies have shown that sales professionals who were considered „weak closers“ were unskilled in creating or identifying the need.
3. **Preventing/Overcoming Objections** – Although objections are inevitable in any sales process, studies have shown that the key for successful sales professionals/recruiters is actually in preventing objections. By asking the right types of questions in step 2, many objections that would have arisen in the process are addressed before the candidate has an opportunity to bring them forth. Keep in mind that some objections are inevitable, that they are often training responses, and that most are emotional and not practical.
4. **Filling the Need/Providing Benefits** – Identifying the need is considered the most crucial skill in sales or recruiting; filling the need is the second most critical step to ensuring success. Often recruiters and sales professionals alike pay little attention to step 2 and focus solely on step 4. Like many sales professionals, recruiters often focus on what is commonly known in sales language as their „product knowledge“. They have an in-depth understanding of the organization they are recruiting for, they understand every detail of the position and its function, and they completely understand the requirements of the role. Armed with all of this product knowledge, these untrained recruiters contact potential candidates and attempt to „tell“ them about every benefit of the position and company they represent, never addressing the real needs of the candidate. This is a common mistake that is made by most sales professionals and is illustrated further in this article.
5. **Advance/Close the Sale** – In recruiting and sales, advancing the sale is the final objective throughout every step of the process. By filling the need in Step 4 you are in a position to advance the sale to the next step. In recruiting, closing is most commonly compared to presenting the offer and gaining acceptance from

the candidate. At this stage recruiters often focus on the practical aspects of the offer being made; compensation, benefits, perks etc. Effective recruiters and sales professional alike understand the importance of re-emphasizing the emotional drivers identified in Step 2 of the sales process prior to presenting the practical aspects of the solution.

Although these 5 steps are critical to the success of every recruiter, most focus and are trained only on steps 1, 4 and 5, skipping the most important step...Identifying the Need. A common example of this from a sales perspective can be illustrated by a recent trip I made to a new automobile dealership.

I have had the good fortune of purchasing in excess of 15 vehicles over the past decade from the same sales professional, having followed her from one dealership to another due to her level of customer service and understanding of my needs and driving habits. During the purchase of my last vehicle, I experienced the common sales mistakes made by sales professionals and recruiters alike.

As I entered the showroom I was informed by the receptionist that my normal sales representative was on vacation for the day and that another individual would be called to assist me in her absence. I indicated which vehicle I wished to receive additional information on as I proceeded to walk through the showroom. The vehicle in question was located on the opposite side of the showroom and as I began to move in that direction a bright red sports car caught my eye. As a car collector, I began to walk around and admire the quality of the vehicle, its flawless paint, leather seats, shiny wheels, convertible top, etc. Just as I finished looking at the vehicle a sales representative approached me and introduced himself as Tom.

Tom proceeded with Step 1 of the sales process and began to develop a relationship with me by asking about the vehicles currently in my collection while indicating that he has a number of collector vehicles as well. Upon noticing that he had my attention, Tom moved on to Step 4 of the sales process and began to explain the specifications and history of the red sports car that I was admiring. He knew the previous owner, performance specifications, date of each engine modification, official paint color, and so on. It was obvious that Tom had his product knowledge about the vehicle memorized and could speak to the advantage of each feature. As he wrapped up his description of the vehicle the subject moved to its cost or „related investment“. At this point I indicated to Tom that the price was not an issue and that I was not interested in purchasing the vehicle.

As a well trained sales professional, Tom proceeded to Step 3 and attempted to overcome my objections on why I was not interested in purchasing this vehicle today since it was on sale. As I turned and looked at Tom I stated that I had entered the

dealership with the specific purpose of gathering additional information on a specific SUV. Tom looked at me and asked “Why didn’t you tell me?” to which I replied “You didn’t ask!!!!”

Unfortunately this is a common problem in professional recruiting today. Recruiters like to tell about the great position, company and opportunity that they currently have without having asked any questions to identify the needs of the potential candidate. This „telling” versus “selling” approach continues to be prevalent among the majority of recruiting organizations, minimizing the benefits of sourcing tools, branding, and recruiting technology available today.

Today’s recruiting environment is changing at a rapid pace. In order to develop a competitive edge over their competition, companies must understand that the profile of today’s recruiter must also change. An effective recruiter will be seen as a sales professional who exemplifies the ability to develop candidate relationships, identify candidate needs, overcome or prevent objections, fill the candidate’s needs and advance the sales process. Recruiters need to be given the appropriate training to move from “telling” about their opportunity to “selling” their opportunity.

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