

10 Things Employment Recruiters Won't Say



1. "There are better ways to find a job."

A recruiter or agency is one part of a job search, but it shouldn't be your primary source – and maybe not your secondary one, either. Referrals – that is, a connection made by someone you know – remain your best bet. CareerXRoads' annual survey of more than 200 employers shows that the percentage of hires made through referrals has remained remarkably consistent over the last five years. Nearly 27% of respondents said referrals were the biggest factor in external hires in 2009, practically unchanged from its 27.1% figure in 2005. Third-party agencies, meanwhile, accounted for only 2.3% of external hires last year, compared to a 5.2% success rate in 2005.

2. "We don't work for you."

Christy Ezelle, a media advertising executive in New York, was in her first job out of college when she got a call from a headhunter working for a major advertising agency. It was a good experience, until she tried to negotiate her salary – the company wouldn't budge. Why? They had already shelled out for the headhunter that tracked her down – a fee that was eating into the amount they were willing to pay Ezelle. Recruiters work for the hiring company, and that's where their allegiance lies – not with the job-seeker. That means headhunters will always be more interested in making their client happy than in finding a candidate the best possible package, says Carolyn Dougherty, an executive search consultant in Villanova, Penn. "There's a belief that the recruiter is working on the candidate's behalf and that's not the case," she says. "They're working for the client – that's where the fee is coming from." And because most recruiters don't get paid until the position gets filled, they care more about sealing the deal than about getting you another \$10,000.

3. "Until a year ago, I was a car salesman."

There are no laws or rules that govern what constitutes an "employment agency" or who can call himself a recruiter, and setting up shop is pretty easy: A year's worth of advertising, office space, travel and communications equipment is just \$50,000 for an experienced recruiter like Eleanor Sweet, who runs the Remington Group in Barrington, Ill., an hour outside of Chicago; a rookie could put out a shingle for far less. Anyone

I don't know where you got your information, but it paints a highly distorted view of the way executive recruiters work. Certainly there are good people and bad people in every profession, but a lot of the weak recruiters have been washed out of the business during the current economic downturn. As someone who has been a successful executive recruiter for almost thirty years, I will tackle your points one by one.

1. There are better ways to find a job.

Every job seeker should work their network. Employee referrals are the number one way that companies find new employees. The second best channel for a jobseeker to use is a strong executive recruiter who specializes in their field. Specialization is paramount in the recruiting business and can't be overemphasized. You will have a lot more success using a top recruiter who specializes in your niche than answering internet job ads and then never getting a response.

You are misusing the statistics when you state that recruiters have only a 2.3% to 5.2% success rate. Recruiters don't work on the majority of low level jobs in the American workplace. They are called in to work on mid and senior management jobs and hard-to-fill technical spots. The percentage of all external hires is a different thing entirely than recruiters' success rate which for a good one runs 85-90%.

2. We don't work for you.

That's absolutely true but it affects candidates in a much different way than you describe. Some, mostly desperate jobseekers, apply for jobs that they are only marginally qualified for and can get very angry when a recruiter doesn't move their candidacy forward. We are supposed to save time for our client companies, not waste it by sending them people who do not fit their parameters.

As far as salary negotiation goes, like all professional negotiators our job is to bring both parties together. A good recruiter will know a company's give and take parameters and will also discuss candidate priorities. Sometimes all parties end up being happy and sometimes we will arrive at a compromise where neither side is 100% happy but that everyone can live with. That's the way life is. If we don't negotiate to reach a level of

can do it, she says, "It's pretty much like getting a real estate license."

That means job seekers have to vet a recruiter with the same diligence they'd investigate a potential employer. Ask how long the recruiter's been in the business, and where they've placed candidates in the past – and then call those companies and confirm, experts advise. Also, though a certification isn't required to be a recruiter, there are a handful of designations a pro can earn. Getting certified as a Temporary Staffing Specialist, a Personnel Consultant, or a Professional in Human Resources don't require any coursework, but all require previous experience and the passage of an exam – legitimate hoops for a dedicated professional to jump through. One strategy to avoid at all costs: firms that charge for job search services or call themselves "fee-based counselors" raise red flags with experienced recruiters, because "It's expected that the company pays the fee," says Dougherty. (see No. 2, above).

4. "The job we advertised may not exist."

Recruiters often advertise appealing jobs that aren't vacant, just to build up a stable of candidates, says Nick Corcodilos, who heads the executive search firm North Bridge Group and runs www.asktheheadhunter.com in Lebanon, N.J. From a staffing firm or recruiter's perspective, this is a practical way to do business, because many assignments offer a bonus for filling a key job fast. But for the job hunter, it's misleading, raising false hopes at an already anxious time.

That doesn't mean an applicant's efforts are useless. Just because there's no job now doesn't mean there won't be one in a few months. Jeremy Dixon, general manager at A-1 Temps in Tampa, says client companies will ask him for 50 people qualified for customer service positions "in a couple of weeks." If he has a sufficient pool of established applicants, he can place them in a hurry.

For the best odds of success, job-seekers should identify companies and positions they're specifically interested in and seek out recruiters who work with them. (This is particularly true for anyone seeking an upper management job, for which companies typically rely on an established relationship with a recruiter or recruiting firm.)

5. "We already know quite a bit about you."

As soon as you sign up with a recruiter or search firm, they check you out – your background, your credit history, even legal records. That's why they have applicants sign all those disclosures. If you want to work with them, you have to submit. That's fairly standard in the job market these

happiness for the jobseeker, then they don't take the job and we don't get paid.

3. Until a year ago I used to be a car salesman.

I can't speak for the other states but I'm based in New Jersey and New Jersey does have laws, rules, exams, and licensing requirements. As in all professions there are good people and bad people. In fact, I would slice them into three groups. First, there are the recruiters that just aren't very good at what they do. This comprises about fifty percent of them. The good news for jobseekers is that not only can you tell that they're not very sharp just by talking to them but most of these have been forced out of the business during the recent economic downturn. About twenty-five percent of recruiters excel and are very professional. They have long and successful careers in the recruiting business. Obviously, these are the ones you want to work with. Unfortunately, another twenty-five percent are what I call journeymen and these can be dangerous. They generally do well enough to make a good living but just barely. They are the ones who sound fairly knowledgeable but are really living from deal to deal. While a strong recruiter will take a long term perspective on dealing with both clients and candidates, a journeyman is desperate for the next deal to close and may be less scrupulous. Many of these journeymen have recently been forced out of the industry but those that are left are more desperate than ever. All clients and jobseekers should do deep reference checks before using a recruiter. Stay away from the "Discount Daves".

4. The job advertised may not exist.

This is again a question of doing your homework. A top recruiter will be far too busy working on current specific search assignments to be fooling around with busy work. Also, keep in mind that strong well-known recruiters already have unsolicited resumes pouring over the transom during the current economic downturn.

Do your homework and avoid the "Discount Dave's" who don't have current job searches generally because they don't have a good track record filling them. They have the time to post phony jobs in the hope that they get a few strong resumes that they can email blast to every company they know. Generally they're just throwing as much mud on the wall as possible to increase the chances that something may stick.

5. We already know quite a lot about you.

This is just plain wrong. Almost no recruiter runs credit and legal checks on people just because they received their resume. In fact, recruiters

days, whether or not you work with a recruiter, but unlike a recruiter, a prospective employer usually doesn't do the background check until after he's met you. That gives a candidate the opportunity to impress on his merits, and explain anything that might be dodgy in his history. Working through a recruiter, a job seeker might never get that chance.

In that case, all you can do is make sure that the information they have is accurate, says Corcodilos. Almost 80 percent of credit reports contain errors, and 25 percent have what's considered to be a "serious error" such as false delinquencies or accounts that did not belong to the consumer, according to a 2004 study from U.S. PIRG. To ensure you'll be judged on your own merits, check your credit report for errors and take steps to fix what you find.

6. "Our jobs aren't so hot either."

Because most agencies don't get paid unless they place candidates at jobs, the weak labor market has taken its toll. In Orange County, Calif., for example, the 20 largest employment firms saw revenue drop almost 20% in 2009, prompting many to lay off employees, according to an Orange County Business Journal survey. A lot of experienced people have left the field, says Darrel Gurney, an independent career consultant who runs the CareerGuy.com web site, leaving "empty desks and brand spanking new people who have never done this before." That means you often don't get the best help in your job search, particularly working with smaller firms, he says. Bigger, national and international firms are doing better. Revenue at Switzerland's Adecco, the world's largest staffing company, rose 16% in July and August. Meanwhile, revenues at domestic search firms Manpower (MAN: 55.30, -1.16, -2.05%) and Robert Half International (RHI: 27.40, -0.04, -0.14%) are up 15% and 6% respectively in the last three months, in part a result of an increase in revenue-producing job placements.

7. "You're at the mercy of a computer, just like online job board users."

The rise of online job sites like Monster (MWW: 14.46, +0.09, +0.62%) and Careerbuilder has changed the way many staffing professionals work. The sites use computer programs to scan applications for particular keywords – and now, so do recruiters. Even if you submit your resume on fancy stationery, it gets scanned by the recruiter or staffing agency. Especially for entry or mid-level jobs, cover letters don't get read, Gurney says: It's this digital process that drives the professional match-making.

would much rather have the hiring company run these checks so that the liability is theirs should anything go wrong. Sometimes a client will ask the recruiting firm to do this either in an attempt to shift liability or just out of plain laziness. So the reality is recruiting firms may do this sometimes but they would much prefer not to.

6. Our jobs aren't so hot either.

Again do your homework and check multiple references. You also have it exactly backwards. The big national firms are the ones with huge overheads to support and they have lots of recruiting desks to fill with fresh shiny inexperienced faces. The small boutique firms have lower overhead, fewer mouths to feed and are not desperate to fill desks. In fact, most of them have cut their dead wood.

7. You're at the mercy of a computer, just like online job board users.

You are describing what happens at the big recruiting machines with lots of desks filled by inexperienced recruiters. Strong, experienced people in the specialized boutique recruiting world eyeball pretty much every resume that comes in.

After years of experience, it takes them all of ten seconds to decide if a resume gets put in the review and interview file or the "why did this engineer send us a resume when we specialize in accounting file? Delete."

I quickly eyeball every resume that comes through our office. What I look for is:

What company did he work for?

What did the company do? A lot of people don't include this.

What was his job title?

When was he at the company?

I look down the resumes with those four questions. It takes fifteen seconds and sometimes less. Then I file as interview immediately or put into the "we don't have anything today but could in the future queue" and interview them as I get to them. The completely off target ones (about a third) I delete. We do triage every single day.

8. The "temp to perm" carrot is rotten.

The temp to perm carrot is rotten. It is a marketing ploy but it's not directed at candidates. It's a marketing tool used with stingy hiring companies who want to try everyone out for an extended period of time without paying the full recruiting fee up front. Some hiring firms use it to lure in "permanent temps" who they never pay benefits to.

To get through the computer gatekeeper, applicants need to make sure the relevant, searchable words are on their resumes. For example, he says, if you want to work in the entertainment industry, listing a past job at Sony Pictures on your resume isn't enough; the word "entertainment" must be there too. Candidates who aren't sure what the magic keywords are should look at the description of the job they're applying for, says Jessica Mazor, an account manager for the accounting and finance business at Kforce Professional Staffing (KFRC: 15.40, -0.22, -1.40%) in New York. The "must have" criteria in the description are particularly important.

8. "The 'temp-to-perm' carrot is rotten."

Many staffing agencies hold out the promise of permanent jobs after success in a temporary position, but that trend isn't holding in this recovery. Since temporary employment trends hit bottom in September 2009, the U.S. Department of Labor says the service and professional sectors have added 392,000 temporary jobs. But the CareerXroads survey showed that positions explicitly advertised as temp-to-perm accounted for just 1.6% of all hiring in 2009 – and even in better times, that rate was only around 3%. "Temp-to-perm is basically a marketing ploy," says Corcodilos, who says it's really more of a fantasy: "It's what recruiters would like to see happen."

9. "If you have a job, I could get you fired."

Not all recruiters are careful, and the last thing you want is to have your resume land on the desk of your current boss. This is a very real risk, says Sweet, president of the Remington Group, so job seekers need to make sure they know exactly what recruiters are doing on their behalf. "Put every recruiter you work with on notice," she says. "Say, 'You do not have permission to release my paperwork without my permission.'"

And then there are the aggressive recruiters who pull resumes off LinkedIn profiles and job boards and circulate them without getting the candidates permission – or even letting him know. That's what happened to Michael Segel, an information consultant in Chicago, who was interviewing with several different companies when one prospective employer asked him why he'd received his resume twice. An overzealous recruiter whom Segel had never met had sent it. Now Segel only posts his resume as an un-alterable PDF, and he keeps careful track of where he and any recruiters he's working with send it. He says it can't stop the practice of unauthorized circulation, but if he's contacted by a recruiter he doesn't know, he can

Whenever a potential client company approaches me with this sort of scheme, I point out to them why it's against their own interests. When a hiring company wants to hire temp to perm they are only going to get unemployed people as candidates. Some of them will be good and some won't but the company has immediately eliminated the candidacy of everyone who is currently working a full time job. No full timer in his right mind is going to take a flyer on a temp to perm gig. The company therefore has a severely weakened candidate pool. Hiring the best person out of a weak candidate pool is not a strategy for moving your company forward.

9. If you have a job you could get fired.

This is again a question of doing your homework. Find an experienced recruiter in your field. They will happily agree not to send your resume anywhere until the two of you discuss a current specific opening and you ask them to pursue it.

It is not in the interest of a strong recruiter to just email blast resumes around. If a company says they would like to interview a candidate and then the recruiter finds out that candidate is not interested, then he will look pretty stupid in the eyes of that employer.

Top recruiters spend their time working on current specific and usually exclusive openings. Due to their poor track records, the "Discount Daves" are increasingly desperate because they have few, if any, loyal clients. They may shotgun resumes around just praying that anything might stick.

10. If I'm in Virginia, I probably won't help you find a job in Nebraska.

Gee, you almost got it but not quite. In the age of the internet (or really even the age of the fax machine or telephone) there is no reason for recruiters to be limited by geography. At a big national recruiting machine filled with inexperienced recruiters, each office may have a territory which is pretty much what they exclusively focus on. That said, the top recruiters are specialized in one of two ways. Many focus on a specific industry (for example, I focus on the toy business) and they will tend to work nationwide or even globally. Others focus on a specific job type (for example, IT or finance and accounting) and they will typically have a regional focus. Strong recruiters will tell you that they are next to worthless outside their area of expertise. A weak recruiter will tell you he's an expert at everything.

So, to wrap up – find yourself a top experienced recruiter in your field. Check references! Tell him the companies that you have worked at and ask him for references from some people that you

quickly figure out what's happened. "I usually cut off contact right there," he says.

10. "If I'm in Virginia, I probably won't help you find a job in Nebraska."

If you're willing to relocate, don't rely on your contact in your home city to help you find work outside the area — even if you're working with a national search firm. Recruiters at big firms have little incentive to spread your resume around to other locations; they'll have to split a commission with the colleague that helps you land a job. Instead, send your resume to the branch offices in the places you would like to go. As soon as that office has you on file, "they take ownership of your search," says Sweet. Smaller, more local firms agree — and may even refer you to someone else. "We have alliances with other staffing companies," says Diana Wall, a senior account manager at Accel Financial Staffing in Oklahoma City. "There's no commission — it's all friendly referrals."

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may already know. A top recruiter should be able to provide these. Ask him how he works with candidates and also tell him what you expect. If the references check out and he seems reasonable and honest — you probably have your guy. If the references are sketchy and he then promises you the sun, the moon, and the stars; look out — he's probably a "Discount Dave".

Lastly, as a Smart Money subscriber, I must say that I am disappointed. I always thought that the "10 Things" column was a helpful peek behind the curtains. Now that I've seen the hatchet job that you did to an industry that I've been involved with for nearly thirty years; I've learned that instead of getting the inside scoop, I'm just getting "the general myths and complaints of the obviously misinformed".

Journalism is about more than just pumping out controversial headlines. Then again, controversial headlines sell more magazines which allows you to sell more ad space and at a higher price. Perhaps, you should write a "10 Things Your Magazine Publisher Doesn't Want You to Know". Please let me know if I can be of help.

Sincerely,

Tom Keoughan, President
Toyjobs.com

Source: The Fordyce Letter