To Navigate the Rough Seas - It's All in Your Decisions

Recruiters everywhere are sending out S.O. S. signals. If it's not a jobless recovery to worry about it's the potential for a double dip recession. Many of us are searching for a magical formula in these tumultuous times in hopes of weathering the storm. If there were such a thing and it could be bottled, we would all buy a lifetime supply and sail away to some far away Caribbean destination. It is true, our industry along with many others have experienced some choppy seas over the last 18 months due to the devastating economic tsunami.

Many of us have had the wind taken out of our sails, we let go of the ropes and let the sails flap in the breeze, hoping that divine intervention would save us. It did not. Some of us grabbed a pair of oars and rowed as best we could, only to find that we expended more energy and got nowhere fast. A few of us battened down the hatches and dropped anchor to survive. And a few of us became better Sailors.

It is not the ship so much as the skillful sailing that assures the prosperous voyage – George William Curtis

Don't get ready to walk the plank just yet. Now is the time to get your recruiting skills in ship shape. What can you do to guarantee smooth sailing in the months ahead?

Your success is all in the decisions you make

It sounds so simple. Most of life's basic principles are. "Buy low, sell high". "Eat less, move more". It is so very simple, yet so true. Where you are in life TODAY is all due to the decisions you have made in your life thus far, both good and bad. If you have made a few bad choices along way, don't let them hinder your success, you're only human and we all have been there. The good news is that life is far from over. There is no time limit on success, one must simply make good decisions from here on out.

How does this relate to recruiting? *Your results are all about the decisions you make*; from what clients you choose to work with, to the job orders (Search Assignments) you choose to work on, to the candidates you choose to represent.

Client Decisions

One of the most important decisions for any recruiter has always been choosing the right companies to do business with. This is even more critical now than ever before. Valuable time and resources are at a premium and can't be wasted.

If you evaluated all the time you spent on searches in 2009, most of us will find that some clients took an enormous amount of time – with limited results. You will also find out that you had some clients who you didn't spend a tremendous amount of time with, however you made more placements with them. Knowing this information is crucial to you and your firm. In going forward the decision is simple. *Spend more time with clients and prospects like those that you have made the most placements with and less time with the prospects or clients that are time wasters with limited results*.

This is often easier said than done, especially when working with new clients. Many of the reasons why time is wasted directly relate to sense of urgency, exclusivity issues, or having direct access to the Hiring Manager. Sound familiar? A large number of these time wasters that apply to the clients we choose to do business with directly correlate back to some point from the Job Order Matrix. Using the evaluation

process that is involved with this form (discussed in more detail below) can significantly minimize the risk of spending too much time working with bad clients.

Job Orders Decisions

During the past 18 months, when a recruiter got a job order from a client – it was time to drop to your knees and thank the heavens above. Unfortunately, unless we took the time to determine if it was a good enough job order to work on, it often added up to time spent on searches - more work and no placements. More of the rowing harder to get nowhere fast kind of thing. Navigating through the murky waters today requires a steady rudder.

Now more than ever it's important to evaluate each Job Order or Assignment **"before"** you commit to taking the search. There are ten critical factors that need to be measured: Sense of Urgency, Difficulty of Search, Exclusivity, Hiring Cycle, Salary, Potential for Repeat Business, Mutual Cooperation, Fill-ability, Fee and Interview dates. Each of these areas are listed on the Job Order Matrix and provide a scale for measurement and evaluation. (Feel free to use the form my office uses here at the following link: http://talentwinsonline.com/articles/fordyce2010/Job%20Order%20Evaluation%20Matrix%202009.pdf) Bob Marshall did a wonderful job at developing this tool years ago, and I simply tweaked the masterpiece.

To insure we have a complete understanding of all the variables that could affect the success the search, we must get back to the basics and first take a "complete" search assignment profile. Use the Job Order Matrix to evaluate the search and don't stress if it is lacking in a few areas. Keep in mind that there will always be "areas for improvement" in the search – seldom do we see searches that are perfect. Now you have a good understanding of the challenges you will need to address to perform a successful search. It's then time to go back to the client to see if they can change some of the issues that are causing you some concern in fulfilling the assignment. Again, this needs to be done before you commit to the search itself.

For example; *"Mr. Client, before we can commit to begin the search for your Vice President of Engineering, there are a couple areas that we need to discuss. We have concerns that they may cause us some problems in getting you the best potential candidates available in the market place. When we talked about hiring process, you had mentioned that you need at least 8 weeks to get your process completed. We have found that if it takes longer than 3-4 weeks for an interview process, we lose our best candidates. We lose them to other opportunities and well as to their current employer. What can we do to shorten the process? In 3-4 weeks, we can determine if they are the right fit for your organization as well as give the candidate sufficient time to determine if it's a good fit for them. We also have less of a chance to lose our best candidates due to time delays, other opportunities or fear of leaving their existing employer that sets in when too much time goes by."*

Each area of the search that presents a concern should be addressed and discussed with the client to see if any changes can be made. Often changes can be agreed upon and clients appreciate the knowledge and honesty that you provide. If the client is not willing to work with you on making the process a win-win or to increase the chances of a successful search, it is advisable to decline the assignment. You do not want to be calling "Man Overboard" any time soon.

Candidate Decisions

How many times have you gotten to the end of a hiring process where the client is excited about your candidate, the offer comes at exactly the amount you need and then…….. the candidate turns the offer down, or doesn't show up for the final interview….or takes a counter offer? What ever the reason, you end up not making the placement and not collecting any check for all of your efforts. Nothing could be more disheartening. Been there… done that.

One way to drastically reduce this from happening is to make the decision that you will only work with the best and most qualified candidates. How can you insure you are only working with the best? By choosing to continually re-qualify the candidate throughout the process and getting the approval to accept an offer on the candidate's behalf at the conclusion of the interview process.

Having the ability to accept an offer for a candidate is huge. It involves trust, credibility and developing a relationship based on these terms. All of this is a result of setting the stage for a successful relationship in the beginning and outlining who has what roles.

When I get a candidate on the phone and find out they are a fit for the position I am recruiting on, I set expectations. The expectations lay the ground work for the roles and responsibilities of each stake holder in the process as well as establishing how we will work in going forward. When setting expectations, determining and confirming the dollars to accept on their behalf after the final interview is critical. It stops salary creep from happening at the end of the process. Following is an example of the expectations document we use.
http://talentwinsonline.com/articles/fordyce2010/Setting%20Expectations.pdf

Along with setting expectations, qualifying and re-qualifying candidates is one of the most critical parts of the recruiting process. Even more so today! The general rule is to qualify and re-qualify early and often. We do this with the candidates on every conversation. Why so often? Life happens fast and can change in a moment. We need to know where our candidates are at in the decision process at every conversation. The three most critical points for qualification and requalification are on the first conversation, before the second interview and before the final interview. We take a great deal of time before the second interview especially and fill out a Candidate Requalification and relocation form. http://talentwinsonline.com/articles/fordyce2010/CDS%20Requalification%20Form.pdf This gives us a snapshot of where the candidate is at – midway through the process. Do they have enough interest to proceed, are they a good match for the position, are they willing to accept the position if offered? This is a point in the recruiting process where we need to make a decision if it makes sense to go forward with this candidate in the process.

The final step in re-qualifying the candidate – is having the ability to *accept an offer on their behalf before* the final interview. The day before the final interview – ask the question, *"If I get you the 100K plus 20% bonus, can I accept the offer on your behalf?"* This question alone will increase your success more than any other step in the recruiting process. Why is this so effective? First of all it lets you know if the candidate is ready to accept an offer. Secondly, it gets out any remaining objections before the final interview. If the candidate does not allow you to accept an offer on their behalf, you must ask Why? **Until you get a number to accept on their behalf, don't allow them to go on the final interview.** This will quickly flush out any concerns or issues so you can address them before the final interview and go forward confident of the close.

The wind and the waves are always on the side of the ablest navigator. – Edmund Gibbon

Navigating a recruiting ship in any environment isn't easy. Add in the economic tidal waves of the last 18 months and it becomes a job that will challenge even the most seasoned captain.

If you find yourself currently between the devil and the deep blue sea, don't jump ship yet. Hoist your sails and focus on making the right decisions in going forward. Choose to work with the clients that will bring you topside, qualify your Job Orders and only work with the best candidates. The decisions we make in life are critical to our success. In Recruiting it is no different. Practice making better decisions everyday and you will experience smooth sailing on life's vast ocean. Anchors Aweigh!!!

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