

The Universal Truths of Recruiting

By Jon Bartos

There are a few things you can count on in this world. The sun will rise in the east and set in the west. What goes up must come down. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. The funniest guy at your office holiday party will regret it Monday morning.

In recruiting, as in life, there are absolutes. Unshakeable truths that simply aren't negotiable. In our industry, they are the Universal Truths of Recruiting and those who learn them have a million-dollar advantage over those who doubt them.

Planning will be the foundation of your success or failure in recruiting.

A well thought-out game plan is essential in our industry. A great recruiter with a poor plan will only get low-to-average results. An average recruiter with a great plan will get great results. A great recruiter with a great plan will be at the top of his game with the earnings to prove it.

Your recruiting business must be open for business most of the day.

When you are on the phone, you are open for business. When you are off the phone, you are closed for business. It sounds simple. But so many recruiters ignore this basic, obvious truth. If you aren't on the phones the majority of the day (4 hours of connect time), you might as well hang out a closed sign. Good recruiters know that the phones are their chance to spin hay into gold. They know that repeatedly checking voice mails, surfing the internet and spending hours on paperwork are career killers. You can try to fool yourself with quality calls versus quantity calls. But in this industry, less is never more. The brutal truth of recruiting is that more than half will leave the business within the first few months – because they aren't open for business long enough to stay in business.

If you don't set clear expectations up front, they will never be met.

Sound familiar? "I haven't heard from my number one candidate in two weeks. She won't return my calls." Or, "I sent them three great candidates four days ago and I've heard nothing since even though I've called twice a day."

New recruiters experience frustration every day. The key to putting an end to this is control. We must stay in control of every search – and that is easy to do as long as clear candidate and client expectations are defined from the beginning.

In your initial conversations, outline how you work. Set ground rules: establish communication methods (email, phone), communication frequency, and expected feedback time frame. Be very clear, "For this professional relationship to work, we both have to be completely open and honest at all times. If anything changes on either

end, we need to communicate that immediately. We can help each other succeed, but we don't ever want to waste each other's time."

They all lie (clients and candidates).

It may sound cynical but it's the truth: clients and candidates lie. It's not a stinging indictment of the human race; it's just that people don't like to deliver bad news. As a recruiter you've worked hard for your clients and candidates. You've done a great job at building a good rapport and a strong relationship. They don't want to hurt your feelings by telling you the truth: this isn't going to work out. So they delay. They don't return phone calls or emails. They keep you hoping. They don't tell you they've decided to move in another direction. Or they lie.

How do you achieve an honest dialog with clients and candidates? Set yourself up to succeed from the onset of the search, "Communication is the most important factor in our relationship. We will both have good and bad news to share. No matter what the news is – in order for us to do our jobs properly – let's agree to share all the information in a timely manner. It helps save time and focuses our energies where they need to be. If at anytime your interest level falls in this candidate or opportunity I need to know about it immediately. At the end of the day, our word and integrity is all we really have in life, don't you agree?"

When that little voice in your head says something is wrong, there is!

You know the feeling. Your hair stands up on the back of your neck, or your stomach flip-flops. It's your instinct, your subconscious, telling you something isn't right with a client or candidate. It may be an unexpected response to a question when qualifying a job order. Or an inconsistent statement when questioning a candidate about his commitment level to a new opportunity. We hear it, that little voice saying something is wrong – and we better do something about it.

Many recruiters ignore their instincts because they don't want to acknowledge bad news. Do not make that mistake! Anytime alarm bells sound, it is a wakeup call. Ask questions, "Wait a minute, I want to be sure I understood where you are coming from with your answer to my last question." Or, "Has anything changed since the last time we talked?" Or, "Are you still a 10 on a scale of 1-10 on the opportunity?"

The recruiting gods are fair – as long as you have a positive attitude and consistent output.

We all have those weeks or months when everything seems to go wrong. A candidate who just said yes to a new position flips and accepts a counteroffer from his current employer. A fall-off happens after 30 days with a new company and you haven't been paid yet. A client unexpectedly starts working with another recruiter. These things happen. The good news about recruiting is that it is essentially a fair business—as long as you work hard to keep it that way. Maintain a positive attitude. Keep a consistent pipeline of jobs and candidates at all times. Never forget you're playing a whole season, not just one game.

If you don't work with the hiring manager directly, you will spend double the time on the search to fill it. *If you fill it.*

HR departments. We've all dealt with them. The ones who demand you work exclusively with them. The gatekeepers who never give you access to the hiring manager. You jump through hoop after hoop. It can feel like you're performing in the circus – doing all sorts of tricks but going nowhere.

In handling exclusively HR searches, the sense of urgency is typically reduced significantly – because they don't feel the pain of needing the A player. They don't own the problem, or even have a clear understanding of the true specifications of the position. They have the tendency to weed out great candidates in an administrative judgment, or worse, in an internal power struggle. This dead-end search is a frustration you can do without. If you must work with the HR department, make sure you have contact with the hiring manager. If not, decline the search.

If you think it's more important to you to fill a job order than the hiring manager, it probably is.

We've all been there before. Pour our heart and soul into a search and the hiring manager stops returning calls. It becomes apparent that filling the job order is far more important to you than to your client. What can you do? Be firm. If communication slows down or ceases completely – it's time to reset expectations. To do this, leave a voice mail or shoot them an email: "Due to the lack of response from you on this search, it seems as though this is a higher priority for me than for you right now. Anytime that happens, it becomes a no-win situation for us. Until I hear back from you and we reassess the urgency of this search for you, we not going to make any further investment of time and money. Let me know when your sense of urgency changes – and we can get back to this in the future."

Time kills all deals.

He who hesitates is lost in recruiting. Once a candidate expresses real interest in joining a firm, move. Take decisive action. This "White Heat" zone is only sustainable for a limited time. An offer needs to be made. No one maintains a strong, constant interest level for long – unless there is no real interest in the opportunity. Interest fluctuates like the stock market... up and down. Other factors will influence the candidate that can blow the deal quickly.

If you don't cover the counteroffer early and often, you will lose most candidates to them.

Demographics. A big word that means big changes for our industry. The supply of qualified candidates continues to dwindle as the demand increases for top talent. Shifting populations, aging professionals, and a growing economy mean that counteroffers will get better and better as employers fight to keep A Players. That is why recruiters must address counteroffers early and often. Role play with your candidates. Make sure they understand that counteroffers are not a ticket to the corner office. Explain that in your experience, once a firm knows you've been looking elsewhere, the trust is gone. The best move for the candidate is to move on.

Educate every candidate about counteroffers, giving them skills and strength to address them – head on.

If the candidate sleeps on the job offer, they will dream up reasons not to take it: The recruiter's nightmare.

Many recruiters and hiring managers think it's okay for a candidate to think about an offer overnight. It isn't. The candidate has already been in the interview process for a long period of time – typically two to six weeks. The potential change has been mulled over and discussed many, many times. If you've done your job right as a recruiter, all the pertinent issues have been covered by you – including compensation, benefits, etc. If you have already successfully addressed possible concerns, the only remaining question should be start date. There's no reason to sleep on it. The additional time will only lead to self-doubt—dreaming up reasons to resist change. From the beginning of your relationship, make it clear there will not be a night to think about it. There will be no need. You will make sure the candidate has all the information necessary to make a sound decision before the final interview.

You get what you pay for.

You don't visit your doctor and start arguing over fees, and your clients shouldn't devalue your professional worth that way either. Yes, we are in a service industry, but if a client company tries to negotiate fees – what are they really doing? They are saying very clearly they don't value your services. The more a client does this, the more difficult they will be to work with, and they often present collection problems. If you have a client who won't accept a fair fee agreement, it may be time to end the relationship.

A few years ago, I haggled back and forth over fees for retained searches with a company president. After three days, we finally inked a deal that was more beneficial to the client than to me. I worked hard and made three successful placements. He refused to pay the agreed-upon fees. I had to get my attorneys involved to finally receive payment. The bottom line is: the more a company negotiates your fee down, the less they value your services, the more problems you will have. Recognize the real professional value you offer and respect yourself enough to insist your clients do too.

In recruiting, nothing should be left to chance.

New recruiters may think that you put a hiring manager and a candidate together – and magic happens. Nothing could be further from the truth. Placements do not simply appear out of thin air. The reason our clients pay us the big bucks is to make sure every detail is taken care of and that no mistakes are made. Recruiters who aren't on top of every aspect of a search will find themselves out of a job quickly. It is imperative that we immerse ourselves in every search. Get to know every detail about candidates, from hot buttons to reasons for leaving current positions. Our clients rely on us to take the stress--and the risk--out of the hiring process. It is up to us to make sure the things happen that are supposed to happen. Period.

Your integrity will determine how long you stay in business.

It's simple: do what is right, all the time and every time, not just when it's convenient. We must live by the same rules we ask our clients and candidates to live by. If it's the end of the month and you need a placement: it's not okay to take a candidate from a client. If you discover potentially damaging information about a candidate but withhold it from a client to earn the placement fee: that is dishonest. Your integrity, your standards, must be inviolate. This is the biggest factor in determining recruiting longevity... and long-term success.

Recruiting Standards

1. Always call candidates back to let them know where they are in the process.
2. Never take a candidate from a client.
3. Do not share confidential information with others.
4. Treat others as you would like to be treated.

Our industry is about people. And if there is one similarity we all have, it is that we are all different. But the Universal Truths of Recruiting give us the courage of their convictions: confidence based on these unshakable tenants. These industry truths allow us to live lives we love, and help others to do the same.

Jon Bartos is a premier speaker and consultant on all aspects of human capital. As president and CEO of Jonathan Scott International in Mason, Ohio, he has achieved industry-leading success. He is one of an elite group of executive recruiters who bill over \$1 million annually. Jon has established JSI as a top 10% executive search and contract staffing firm. The office has won over 13 international awards in the MRI Network, including International Billing Manager of the Year and Top 10 SC Office. Jon recently launched Magnum, a personal coaching program based focused on helping recruiters and recruiting managers reach their potential. Jon also has a weekly radio show on Fox called Talent Wins at 2:00pm EST on Sundays on 55KRC THE Talk Station in Cincinnati/Dayton. If you want to listen – go to www.55krc.com and hear him live every Sunday. Jon can be reached at 513-701-5910 or jon@jonathanscott.com