

Strategies for Success in a Candidate Driven Market It's a Whole New Ball Game

By Jon Bartos

As recruiters, we pride ourselves on our ability to understand our clients' talent needs. We partner with them to find, attract and hire the hidden "A" players in any industry. But today we—recruiters everywhere—are facing a new challenge. What happens when the playing field shifts in favor of the talent?

Executive recruiters and our clients are feeling the pinch of the low supply, high-demand candidate market. We've experienced market shifts before, but this one is going to bring dramatic change to our profession. It's a candidate's world out there. And it's only going to get worse.

Over the next five to seven years, 73 million baby boomers will retire. That's a huge chunk of movers and shakers, people who've traditionally set the rules, hired the talent and defined success. The playing field to which we've all grown accustomed will never be the same. As professional recruiters, we must have a game plan in place today to face tomorrow's talent shortage. If you thought recruiting was tough in previous candidate-driven markets, I've got bad news. You ain't seen nothing yet! In the very near future, there is simply not going to be enough talent in the marketplace to satisfy the demand. "A" Players are going to be harder to find and they will be able to choose their teams as well as write their own contracts. Now more than ever, it's critical that recruiters develop a strategy to win in this market.

Don't just fill jobs, bring top talent to the table

As the time-to-fill metric continues to lengthen due to demographic shifts, placing candidates will become tougher and tougher. The most successful recruiters will have anticipated this and be prepared to deal it proactively. They will spend more time bringing the impact player or most placeable candidate (MPC) to clients. In this tightening market, recruiters will find themselves with more job orders than they can handle, however the placements will come more frequently from the MPC marketing call. Your mission is still to find that exceptional "A" player. But now you must spend the time necessary to truly market them to targeted companies. It is hard work that will pay big dividends.

Find all available opportunities for top talent

Once you've found top talent, be prepared to wow them. Don't be content to simply take an "A" player to the market. Be as thorough as possible, finding all available opportunities for him or her. In a sense, you're selling yourself to the candidates to get exclusivity. You can bring an extremely strong value proposition as a recruiter when you can say to your industry's top talent, "I'm going to go out there and market you to all the prospective companies that make sense. I will bring to you all the available opportunities that fit your background. I can help you decide what is best for you and your career."

Stop relying on job boards, employ alternate networking tools

Like last year's favorite birthday gift, the job boards have lost their novelty. You are not going to find the "A" players on the job boards anymore. The top 10 percent of the talent pool are gainfully employed and knocking the cover off the ball for their employers and not looking for another job. Job boards today are populated with B and C players who are looking to make a change. Every recruiter across the country has access to the job boards and thus to these candidates. You aren't going to find anything special there. The last words of a recruiter about to go out of business are, "But that is the way we've always done it."

The truth is "A" players are invisible to the job boards. They don't have their resumes posted and they don't look at job postings. You've got to come up with new ways to find them. The best recruiters are direct recruiting and using the alternate networking tools. I like Linked-In, Xing, Jigsaw, Zoom Info and university alumni associations. These kind of alternate tools will replace the job boards in effectiveness very quickly in this shifting market. Conveniently, some of them are free with additional feature upgrades available for a nominal fee.

Coach your team of "A" players

Once you have identified the "A" players in your industry, you need to become like a trusted career coach to your talent. Like a great coach talks with and mentors his athletes every day, you need to touch your most valuable talent on a monthly basis. Keep yourself in front of them so they are reminded of your value. Keep them abreast of market trends ... don't let them forget for a moment who you are and the value you bring. Always inform your talent inventory about great opportunities and make it a point to provide information that will help them in their careers. In the end, the game will be won by the recruiter with the best talent pool. Develop yours, communicate with them monthly, illustrate your value and you will have clients knocking down your door to get at your talent.

Only work with clients who want a close partner

We've all heard it. "I need you to search for this position, but we will have our internal recruiting or hr staff working on the job as well." While we may have been willing to work under these conditions in a client-friendly market, these are the clients we need to lose in a candidate-driven one. Winning recruiters should make it a firm rule to only work with clients who are 100% committed to you and your efforts on their behalf. Recruiting should never be in a race against a client's internal hr department or against another recruiter they have engaged. That is a losing proposition. A team approach where the client and a sole recruiter work together will deliver the best results for everyone involved: an efficient hiring process and a successful hire.

Work with clients on multiple openings

Recruiters in this market need to be choosy. If a client will only give you one job to fill while handing others to their internal staff or competing recruiters, you may want to discontinue the relationship. The clients we want are the ones who give us multiple openings of the same kind of search, allowing us to benefit from the synergy that comes naturally from the similar opportunities.

Set expectations up front

Part of being a good recruiter is being a great communicator. Set expectations up front with clients and candidates. Explain your strategy clearly; it will be crucial to your success. Discuss with hiring managers how you work, your role in the search, your responsibilities and your hiring time frame. Make sure you define right now the types of situations and clients you will work with tomorrow and those you will not.

When dealing with candidates it's even more important to establish ground rules immediately. Explain your approach, agree upon communication methods and expectations, and make sure they understand your role and their own role in the search. Stress open and honest feedback. Always keep your eye on the prize: the exclusivity to work with them on multiple opportunities.

It's a new playing field

We've all faced challenges in our professional lives. The impending demographic change will redefine our workplace. This highly competitive climate can defeat us or energize us to new success. Whether you're a baby boomer who has seen our industry evolve from headhunters to professional talent consultants, or a 22-year-old recruiter for whom the profession is bursting with potential, now is the time to develop a game plan for a new playing field. Recruiters who are agile and prepared will continue to build winning teams... one player at a time... and to achieve prosperity in a rewarding career.