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RECRUITING TACTICS AND TECHNIQUES

Recruiting is a term often applied to a number of related procedures involved in identifying and employing executives and other high talent individuals. We will refer to recruiting as the process of obtaining the services of the preferred candidate and will distinguish it from the allied processes of sourcing (the identification of potential candidates) and evaluation (normally achieved through interviewing and referencing). This brochure's focus will be on specific techniques important to successfully employing the candidate of greatest potential for your organization.

Most of what will follow could be considered applied individual psychology and will highlight the skills required to identify candidate needs and develop appropriate responses to them. Additional consideration will be given to procedural aspects such as timing, the structure of employment offers and combating counter-offers. However, the psychological impact of each of these issues will predominate.

STRATEGIC RECRUITING PLAN

Effective recruitments require careful thought in order to identify -- before the first candidate is interviewed -- the attractive or salable characteristics of the opening. Isolating these factors and placing them in full view of the candidate early in the process helps achieve maximum candidate motivation.

Those most attractive aspects of a position are always situation and candidate specific. Examples include the proposed role or specific aspects of the organizational entity in which the job exists. The position could be bigger, broader or newly created and have inherent attractive qualities as a result. The organization could encourage entrepreneurship and significant autonomy, which might be alluring to a particular candidate. The environment itself -- in terms of management style, the presence of advanced systems or technology, being an industry leader or being at the beginning of a major change effort -- are all factors of potential interest.

As the employing executive, you might attract a candidate by affording a new employee a significant learning opportunity. The state of the marketplace could be a factor if substantial growth is anticipated. Ownership in the business, if available, is also a **major motivator for certain candidates. There may be aspects of the community and its attendant lifestyle** that c**ould, comparatively, be motivational. Finally, titles of greater authority and compensation are always an allure -- and not only in** a **situation where cash flow might be increased. Unusual or distinctive perquisites are often highly attractive additions as well.**

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IDENTIFYING INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

With a complete analysis of the position's inherent potential motivators in hand, the arsenal of known offensive recruiting weapons has been inventoried and is ready to be used on a selective basis. Because all factors will not motivate candidates in a similar fashion, quick identification of each candidate's motivations early in the sourcing and interview process is required. Those aspects of the position that are responsive to the candidate's needs should be subtly and frequently reinforced throughout the evaluation and recruiting dialogue.

Pull and Push Motivators

Two sets of motivators will influence an employment change. The first are the "pull" factors -- those aspects of the new situation which are highly attractive and may include some of the items previously discussed. They will tend to "pull" the executive away from his or her present situation.

A second set of factors, the "push" factors, are those *unattractive* attributes about the present job situation which will tend to motivate the candidate to consider an employment change. These might include unhappiness with an immediate superior; geographic location; lack of company growth; the political atmosphere; restricted authority or autonomy; or a host of other factors. While none of these necessarily motivate an individual to take a specific job, they do tend to put a person "in play" with less effort.

Where significant push factors are present, they, too, need to be reinforced throughout the process -- not directly, but rather by discussing the contrasting positive aspects of the proffered position. The easiest recruitments are those in which there are significant push and pull factors operational. The most difficult recruitments are those in which there are virtually no push factors and where the pull factors are few.

UNDERSTANDING CANDIDATE BEHAVIOR

Certain predictable behavioral tendencies will, when taken into consideration by the recruiter, make candidate behavior more understandable and can enhance control of the recruitment process. The two most significant behaviors are inertia and skepticism.

Inertia

Every executive has some tendency toward inertia. Even those who are outstanding contributors to their present organization will experience some anxiety when invited to change employers. Certain positive aspects of every work situation -- from functional autonomy to geography -- may make an executive slow to respond positively to a new position.

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A result of this inertial tendency is that it takes time and patience to motivate a potential candidate and, often, this motivation must begin at the conceptual level. The candidate must first establish that any change could be beneficial to career development. Only then can the specifics of a particular job become attractive. To deal effectively with a specific prospect, a clear differentiation must be made between an applicant (one who is already motivated to change jobs) and a candidate (one who needs to be motivated to make the change). In the latter case, the amount of time required on the part of the hiring organization or their agent will be more substantial.

Overcoming inertia requires repetition and reinforcement. A series of discussions may be necessary to motivate an individual to become a serious candidate. Executive recruiters are well aware that two, three or more approaches by phone and in person might be necessary to move a high level executive from a point of disinterest to a position of potential interest. Re-approaching the issue frequently may eventually stimulate serious deliberation, where a single approach or meeting may be insufficient to motivate the person past their point of inertia.

The consistency of the message being communicated to a candidate is also of great importance. The team (client organization personnel with or without executive search help) must present a uniform message and be diligent about meeting follow-up deadlines so that the candidate does not revert back to a state of inertia. It is, after all, very easy for an achievement-oriented executive to be immersed in day-to-day work challenges and put off consideration of a potentially uncomfortable change in his or her life.

Skepticism

Virtually all candidates will be skeptical of the initial approach concerning a new job situation. Each -- directly or indirectly -- senses our cultural bias to sell the advantages and hide the disadvantages of a new situation or product and may expect "hidden pitfalls" in the situation being suggested. Or, a candidate may have had a bitter experience where a prior position was misrepresented and could fear a repeat of an unhappy chapter in their personal history.

Even if initial skepticism does not exist in substantial quantity, it can set in later. There is a learning curve about a new organization, the people and the role which must be perceived by the candidate. If the position, the responsibilities or the organization's climate are represented differently by company members or the outside recruiter, skepticism can be triggered in the middle of the hiring process. This could destroy the recruitment or at a minimum, create delays while the candidate's confidence is rebuilt.

The recruiter and the hiring organization must have a recruiting partnership, presenting the same data realistically and without exaggeration -- or a primary candidate could withdraw for the wrong reason. This includes being clear about potential drawbacks of the job such as the lack of clear promotional progression or the potential for the company to be

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acquired. This candor is necessary because it is better for the person to withdraw as a candidate than to resign in the early employment phases.

KEY STAGES OF RECRUITMENT

Recruitment is a series of related, reinforcing communications which are intended to motivate the preferred candidate to accept a reasonable employment offer. For analytical purposes, the process can be viewed as having several stages, each of which has motivational opportunities for the recruiter to heighten the prospects of success.

Initial Contact

Every recruitment has a beginning; often a telephone conversation between a recruiter and a prospective candidate. This contact is usually precipitated by a referral from an industry or personal source or through the presentation of the candidate's resume on a self-initiated basis. In every case, some general level of understanding of the candidate's background and perceived capabilities is known at the point of initial discussion. While there may be some element of credential or experience evaluation in this first contact, the primary objective is to begin the process of motivating the candidate to a level of active interest in the position. An interested candidate can be rejected later on, but an unmotivated candidate cannot ever be satisfactorily evaluated because they will not be willing to share data openly.

Therefore, the initial approach needs to be positive and strong, without being frivolous. The communications should begin with a statement of belief that the prospect has the potential ability -- because of his or her background and accomplishments -- to contribute to the client organization. In effect, a little flattery is going to be used -- but only where there is existing knowledge of the person's capability and prior contributions. Otherwise it will be read as *false* flattery and will *discourage* interest. The objective is to develop a response from the candidate that will precipitate a face-to-face encounter. To achieve this, the contact should incorporate an attitude that demonstrates professionalism and a positive expectation about the potential candidate's abilities.

This first conversation should be an active dialog in which the candidate demonstrates his or her competence by responding to questions on the direction of the industry, market conditions, or other relevant topics. These items may be reinforced as additional supporting reasons for possible candidacy. Hearing and accepting the potential candidate's point of view will help secure acquiescence to a personal meeting.

Careful attention should be paid to any commentary made during this initial exchange regarding current career motivations or dissatisfactions. If those can be contrasted with the new role immediately, they will add to the probability of a personal meeting. If it is not appropriate to respond right away, note those areas for further evaluation and reinforcement in subsequent discussions.

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Final Interview

Once the prospective candidate is present for an in-person interview, competent interviewing form must be observed for two distinct reasons. First, to do a proper assessment, information must be elicited from the candidate prior to divulging specific position requirements. In this way, the appropriate response is not telegraphed to the candidate. From a motivational perspective, it is equally important to have the candidate talk about his or her background and experiences before discussing details of the role. By gathering extensive data in early phases of the interview, the interviewer's ability to point out the advantages of the proposed job is enhanced. The following paragraphs will highlight specific items that can be used as motivational tools.

Current Job Satisfaction- Attention should be paid to direct statements or inferences which reveal likes and dislikes about the current job situation. A specific exploration of the candidate's current attachment to his or her immediate superior is helpful. Particularly, if the executive has a strong mentor, this is an issue which will need to be addressed, if not immediately, at a later point in the recruitment. Eventually, to achieve recruiting success, the executive will need to perceive an equal or greater amount of support-building in the new boss.

Job Content- Listen carefully for the real authority and responsibility allowed to the executive today. Compare and contrast those with responsibilities and authorities of the intended situation so that the advantages of the change can be highlighted.

Career Goals- Eliciting a statement of career goals from the candidate is also important. Aspects of the new company that will cater to those aspirations can be reinforced.

Secondary Motivators- A review of peripheral aspects of the candidate's motivational profile is also important. These would relate to geographic location, employment potential for the spouse, the interruption or recapture of family ties, the need for special schooling or health care facilities, and any improvements in lifestyle or social options that might be present.

Compensation Details- Finally, the details of the current compensation program should be well understood by the end of the first interview. An apparently smooth recruitment can become very uncomfortable if a misunderstanding emerges about present and projected salary, bonus potential or past and expected payouts, the imputed value of stock options or retirement programs. Getting the full picture early will help tailor the right package later without having to reconfigure due to lack of complete information.

Subsequent Interviews

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At senior levels, it is unlikely that recruitment can be concluded with only a single interview encounter between the employing executive and the candidate. When a search firm is being used, there must be a minimum of two interviews, one with the recruiter and one with the client. Where a series of interviews with several executives in a hiring organization is anticipated, it is important that these be planned and coordinated so that the candidate is not subjected to overlapping or identical sets of questions. Each interview encounter should have a unique focus to explore specific areas of experience and capability on the candidate's part. A logical approach is to have each executive examine the candidate's capabilities in his or her area of expertise (I.e. the chief financial officer could explore accounting and systems backgrounds, while the vice president of sales and marketing would review industry knowledge level).

In an environment where multiple interviews are the rule, these should be scheduled and carried out in a reasonably short cycle. This assures that the process does not become an aggravation to the candidate and that everyone's impressions will be fresh at the point of decision. Each interview should be structured as a learning experience for the candidate and engineered to demonstrate the complexity and importance of the role and contributions expected of the executive if he or she were to accept a job offer.

Spousal Involvement

Particularly where a major relocation is required, the spouse should be involved in the recruitment process. Otherwise successful recruitments have been negatively impacted by the reluctance of the spouse to move. All parties to a change are going to suffer from some inertial forces. Since both must make the relocation, both need to be motivated to make that decision concurrently. If all efforts have been directed only at the candidate (to the exclusion of the spouse) the spouse may, by refusing to relocate, make the decision for the candidate. Inviting the spouse to accompany the candidate during an early interview trip begins to focus everyone on the possibility of the change and to enhance the probability that this will be discussed and accepted.

Employment Offer

The successful recruitment will culminate in the acceptance of a formal offer of employment. In some regards, this should be nothing more than the last in a series of communications making up the recruitment. However, there are factors that differentiate the extension of an offer from the other preceding communications. The employment offer is a terribly critical point in the process that needs deft handling by the employing organization and the recruiter.

Differing Needs- Employment offers are often a point of communication breakdown. This is particularly true where the offer package comes as a (negative) surprise to the candidate who had been misled or allowed to assume that the offer would be much higher than reality. This difficulty in achieving agreement on offer amounts is vested in the fact that

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the candidate is viewing the offer as an ego reinforcement, while the employer is structuring an offer which balances candidate motivation with internal equity and financial conservatism. The organization making the offer is operating in a very rational format and the candidate, having been romanced throughout the process, is viewing the offer emotionally. The larger the offer, the greater the congruity between what has been told to the candidate about their ability to contribute and the perceived rewards. Where the pay differential is modest, incongruity and disappointment are possible.

The actual compensation amount, both short- and long-term, will be different depending upon the understanding developed about the candidate's total matrix of professional and personal motivations. In cases where no "push" factors are at work and "pull" factors are minimal, a more significant compensation package will be required. Similarly, it typically takes a larger differential if relocation is required.

Perhaps the most important role that a third party recruiter can play in the recruitment process is to work carefully with both parties during the structuring and presentation of an employment offer. The recruiter can point out the differing motivations and emotional content levels described above and can keep the parties from painting themselves into a corner. To avoid misunderstandings, communications about the reward structure should be initiated early in the recruitment process so that realism will prevail at the time of the offer.

Making the Offer- While the recruiter can achieve much through preliminary "tests" of an offer with a candidate, the most effective offer is presented in person by the client. If the client travels to the candidate's city and personally makes the final offer, the motivational effect is far greater than receiving the offer by phone or in writing. In fact, written offers should, in virtually all cases, be confirmations of agreements reached during a personal encounter. In-person offers significantly enhance the probability of an acceptance.

During an offer meeting, balance is important. The initial focus should not be on the offer, but should be on job content and the candidate's long-term role and expected contributions to the organization. The "pull" factors of the recruitment are all reinforced one final time and the emotional appeal (made popular by Uncle Sam) is "I Want You" in this job. Focusing on the candidate's long-term prospects within the organization and the long-term earnings potential (in terms of both cash pay and ownership opportunities) somewhat reduces first year cash compensation as an issue. Within this framework, the offer is presented as the starting point of a career earnings track that will be more beneficial to the executive than what is available with the present employer.

Once the offer has been presented, an attempt should be made to gain an immediate positive response. Most candidates will ask for time to consider the overall impact of the offer. Recognizing that the probability of acceptance will only subside after the face-to-face encounter, seek to surface all objections and counter them. If acceptance is not

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achievable on the spot, grant a moderate period for decision-making and establish a deadline which allows the candidate minimal time to rationalize the status quo or generate a counteroffer.

Counter-Offers

It is an unfortunate reality that counter-offers are now commonplace and, sadly, candidates are becoming more responsive to them than they were historically. Counter-offers are so common that not to plan for them is ostrich-like behavior. Increasingly, it has become necessary to address the issue openly with a candidate. If the candidate can be approached on moral grounds, the client can extend an offer conditioned by an agreement that the candidate will refuse a counter-offer from the current employer. This forces the candidate to reach a decision prior to the consideration of the monetary aspects of the offer. If a commitment not to accept a counter-offer is achieved, it should help in concluding the recruitment. In the case where a prospect reneges on such a commitment, one might question their value as a member of the management team.

When a counter-offer is actually extended the candidate's moral obligation not to accept it should surface immediately. This should be done in the context that the candidate's future in their present organization will not change. Promotions will not come any faster and, if it were accepted, he or she might suffer a perceived diminishment in integrity. If the counter-offer is tempting to the candidate, suggest evaluating whether the present employer is solving their own short-term problem or truly acting in the candidate's long-term best interest. In some cases, loyalty could now be in question simply for having pursued an opportunity to the point of offer. The topic of compensation could also be very uncomfortable in future years if it were discovered that the counter-offer would be "amortized" against future salary or bonus amounts. Remember, however, that if you choose to fight this battle on the field of honor rather than the field of economics, it becomes virtually impossible to adjust the original offer in response to the counter-offer! All of these issues clearly make it desirable to head off this confrontation early by developing the candidate's resistance to counter-offers.

Transition/Relocation

A recruitment ends when the new executive is on the payroll -- and not before. While it is uncommon for an executive who has accepted a new position and resigned from the prior company not to appear on the job -- it does have precedent! Therefore, the recruiting process must continue through the active commencement of employment. A positive, high-spirited feeling should prevail during this transition phase to offset any second guessing which the candidate or family members may encounter.

Two significant techniques can be used. One is to involve the candidate in the company and the job before the start date. This can be accomplished by assigning some special project work, providing reading materials, encouraging several house-hunting trips and

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introducing the candidate to the peer group and/or staff during the period prior to active engagement on the payroll. All of these will involve the executive in the new role and reinforce the decision -- as well as to reinforce the concept that he or she is highly valued and much needed in the new organization.

A second tactic is to involve the spouse in getting established in the company's social circle or the new community environment. Providing technical assistance with relocation and creating opportunities for socializing during relocation house-hunting trips are good ways to take some of the anxiety out of the change.

TIMING CONSIDERATIONS

Having reviewed all aspects of the recruiting process, it is clear that it must be planned and controlled to be effective. The timing and flow of communications are just as important as the content of the information exchanged. Scheduling difficulties, if encountered, need to be discussed openly with the candidate so that delays are not misinterpreted as apathy on the part of the employing organization. When such scheduling problems do occur, it is particularly effective if the line executive calls the candidate directly. This personalizes the communication and tends to heighten its believability from a candidate viewpoint. And, until there is a final decision on which candidate is to be made an offer, *every* candidate should be treated as the number one prospect for the job. After all, any one of them might be!

As in any courtship, one must seize the moment and arrive at the point of offer when the candidate's motivation is at its peak. This normally occurs after the second or third meeting with client personnel and declines with the passage of time. As weeks turn into months, candidates become increasingly disinterested. Therefore, the process of evaluating all candidates should be integrated into a compact a turnaround time. A sense of pace should prevail throughout the process bearing in mind that, for the candidate, this is the most anxiety-laden and, possibly, important happening in his or her professional life at the time. Normally, candidates have little understanding of the specific business problems facing the hiring executive and perceive delays more poignantly than the hiring official.

It is also important not to make an offer prematurely. The hiring official has been committed conceptually to make an offer (to someone) long before the final candidate is ready to accept one. On occasion, the second and third interviews are more important in reducing candidate skepticism than they are in providing new decision-making data to the hiring organization. Candidate motivation almost always develops more slowly than hiring executives expect. An offer made before full receptivity has been achieved is sure to be declined or deferred and can cause some embarrassment to all parties. If there is uncertainty about the readiness of the candidate, a direct inquiry can be helpful in establishing the timing or surfacing unresolved issues that need to be addressed before an offer can be accepted.

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EXECUTIVE RECRUITERS

Executive search consultants play a variety of critical roles during recruitment. Typically, they are viewed as primarily oriented to the identification and screening of prospective candidates. There are, however, several critical functions the search professional plays in the recruitment of the final candidate.

Integrity

To represent the client effectively, the recruiter must have the highest level of personal and professional integrity. The recruiter can never oversell the conditions existing within the client organization or the candidate will become skeptical rather than build trust in the employing organization. Since candidates initially tend to disbelieve third party recruiters to an extent anyway, it is best that the recruiter be conservative. Any discrepancies between the recruiter's portrayal of the job and the client's should err by being slightly less positive than the client's. The establishment of the recruiter's integrity and honesty is also critical for effective negotiations later on.

Communications Bridge

The recruiter should be in constant communication with both candidate and client to assure that miscommunications, if any, are identified early and corrected immediately. This, too, helps to establish rapport with the candidate. As a result, the candidate will tend to perceive the recruiter's point of view as unbiased -- even though all parties know that the recruiter is being paid by the client as a recruiting agent. This allows the recruiter to become a sounding board on issues that may be perceived as too politically risky to voice directly with the client. The recruiter's ability to respond to these information requests in a reassuring way heightens the role of confidant, which becomes increasingly critical in the final stages of recruitment.

Process Leveler

Once compensation issues become a serious topic of consideration, the third party recruiter is in the best possible position to bridge the client's concern for control in the pay arena with the candidate's desire for a strong, ego-enhancing statement. By inserting the recruiter in the middle of these preliminary discussions (the client and candidate should eventually address them one-on-one) the possibility of embarrassment and frustration is reduced.

This "buffer" role also allows the potential employer to maintain an upbeat communication style while the recruiter delivers any difficult messages about first year compensation, etc. This preserves the tone established in the first employer/candidate meeting. And, it allows the executive to enter the new employer's business on a positive

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note while the recruiter has absorbed the disappointments and frustrations of the negotiating process.

SUMMARY

The three most important conceptual aspects of the recruiting process are:

1) **Perpetual vigilance in understanding the needs and motivations of the candidate.**

2) **Consistent reinforcement of the positive aspects of the intended situation while at the same time developing the candidate's sense of confidence in his/her ability to perform in the new environment.**

3) **Making the offer when recognition of the new situation's positive attributes has reached its peak.**

Consistent application of these concepts should improve the ratio of successful senior level recruitments.

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