

Get the most out of your recruiter relationship

The job market is more competitive than ever - great career opportunities are hard to find and even harder to land. Employers are looking for talented people with the skills to succeed and they are being more selective than ever.

Working with a recruiter is one way to increase your chance of finding a great job. While working with a recruiter clearly offers a number of advantages, it requires some work and patience on the part of the job seeker. Understanding how to navigate the do's and don'ts of working with recruiters can help you get the most out of your recruiter relationship, and ultimately lead to the best outcome - a great job and improved career opportunities!

The advantages

A recruiter's goal is two-fold:

- Help you land the right role for your career skills and interests
- Find the right person for their client's business needs

Generally, recruiters have a vested interest in a candidate's success, creating a number of advantages for you, the job seeker.

By establishing a relationship with a recruiter, you can tap into broad networks and industry expertise. Often, recruiters thoroughly understand the market and can help answer questions. They know industry trends, salary levels for particular job titles, and which companies are growing and which ones are struggling - unique insight garnered from years of working directly with companies and their executives.

In addition, recruiters can help you prepare for interviews. Employers look for candidates who have abilities beyond those listed on the job description. A good recruiter will tell you how to stand out, what traps to avoid, which experiences and skills to highlight, and how to market yourself and your unique attributes. A great recruiter will practice with you, asking the tough interview questions you might not have anticipated on your own.

Recruiters also have access to the hidden opportunities - those that are not always found on a company website or online job board. A job seekers' dream position could not yet be available at their dream company, but a recruiter might have insider access and know that it soon will be.

Lastly, the workforce has become more mobile and employees are staying in their positions for shorter time periods. It is now common for people to change jobs multiple times throughout their careers. As such, developing a strong relationship with a recruiter can be an element of long-term career success. Although an employer may change, a recruiter can remain a constant throughout a job seeker's career, helping to make strategic career decisions. This sort of dynamic enables recruiters to look for suitable opportunities for candidates, rather than waiting for candidates to contact them.



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Finding the right fit

Once you've decided you want to work with a recruiter, the real work begins. Not every recruiter is right for every candidate, as recruiters often specialise in specific fields and professions. So to find the right fit, turn to the Internet, particularly social networking sites like LinkedIn and Facebook - increasingly important networking tools for job seekers. A simple search will turn up recruiters in geographic areas that work in specific fields. From that point, you can assess other elements of a recruiter's background, such as level of experience. Then, it's time to reach out to the recruiter you feel is the best fit for your goals and interests.

If the recruiter has appropriate open positions or thinks you are a strong enough candidate that they will be able to find positions for you down the line, you will be asked to come in for an introductory meeting. Treat these meetings as you would a job interview! That means bringing a resume and references - former supervisors, even if they now work for different organisations, are ideal - who can attest to your abilities.

Once in the introductory meeting, you should ask questions to determine how much expertise and time the recruiter has to help you. Asking the right questions can also show that you are prepared and committed to exploring new job opportunities, helping to drive a positive relationship from day one. Some examples are:

- Now that you know a little more about me, are there any specific opportunities you have in mind for us to explore?
- After today, when can I expect to hear from you again?
- On average, how quickly do the candidates you work with find a new job?
- How many candidates are you usually working with at any one time?
- Is there anything else I can provide you to help in our search?

The right recruiter will have illuminating answers that demonstrate experience, knowledge of your profession, and available time to devote to you. In this initial meeting you'll be able to spot a recruiter with too many candidates and not enough jobs, and also identify which recruiters are more interested in helping you build your career rather than just placing you in a job!

Avoiding the pitfalls

Recruiters are not mind-readers. To avoid a protracted job search, candidates must be honest about all aspects of their professional background.

Candidates should be truthful about their skills and abilities, work habits and desired salary. It is also important to discuss your previous career experiences and reasons for leaving prior positions or wanting a new one. In addition, think about any other information that would be helpful to your recruiter. Rather than have a potential employer or your recruiter find out through a background check or probing interview questions about a past issue or mistake - legal, financial, or otherwise - it is best to disclose it to the recruiter so they can help you manage the situation proactively rather than be surprised by it as you are in advanced talks for important opportunities.

In addition, you should identify companies you want to explore as well as the ones you do not. A recruiter can help narrow or expand the list, but a frank discussion of desired targets can streamline the job hunt and make the entire process more efficient for you.

Good recruiters are also inquisitive about job seekers, and will ask penetrating questions in order to gain deeper understanding of what they are looking for:

- What are you seeking in a new employer that you do not have available where you are presently working?
- What are the things you like and dislike about your current (or previous) position?
- Are you looking for a higher position, or are you looking for a lateral move?



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Be wary of recruiters who do not ask thoughtful questions; it may be a sign that they do not understand your needs.

Further, to avoid wasted time during your search, it is helpful to provide a list of employers who have received your resume within the last year and the outcome. A recruiter might provide a new approach for getting noticed at a company that did not initially respond, or advise you to hold off on reapplying for now.

While a recruiter can help you secure the interview, it is your responsibility to be prepared when meeting the prospective employer.

Become a star candidate

Recruiters are not out to present their clients with just any candidate for the job. Their credibility is entirely dependent on the calibre of the candidate. As a result, recruiters look for candidates who have strong ideas about what they want, present themselves professionally, and aim to impress.

There are some critical actions you can take to ensure you're at the top of your recruiter's list for all the best opportunities.

First, recruiters appreciate candidates who prepare for interviews. Demonstrating a base understanding about the field, requisite skills and desired attributes of a new position goes a long way to showing the recruiter (and the eventual interviewer) that you are serious and thoughtful. If you are searching for a new job in the financial services industry, demonstrating to the recruiter that you are knowledgeable of market trends and what unique skills are applicable to those trends is a must.

Second, listen to and really consider a recruiter's advice. They are experts at helping candidates position themselves for job opportunities. They know what works and what doesn't; how to format a resume to emphasise certain skill sets; and what kind of qualities a cover letter should highlight. A willingness to take a recruiter's advice does affect how hard that recruiter will work for you. Like any relationship, the one between you and your recruiter is give and take.

Finally, be communicative and prompt. If you want a recruiter to focus their attention on your job search, be on time for meetings and interviews, and be responsive to their phone calls and e-mail. You should always let the recruiter know how an interview went, and your degree of interest in the position. This way, the recruiter has the right information when the employer calls them to discuss how interested they are in potentially hiring you.

Working with a recruiter certainly has its benefits, but is not without its challenges. If you dedicate yourself to finding the right recruiter and creating an effective working relationship, you only increase your odds of finding professional fulfillment.

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