



WHEN YOU NEED TO FILL A CRITICAL POSITION

How to Interview a Recruiter

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In talking with both hiring managers and HR people over the years, I hear a common complaint about some of the recruiting services they've used. Most of the time they complain about recruiters (both internal and external) that simply place ads and flood them with a LOT of resumes. Everyday they get 2, 3, 5, 10 resumes coming in and they have to go through all of them to see if there are any good job candidates and most of the time there isn't. As I said in a previous article, that's not a recruiter, that's a resume broker and they just send any job candidates that even remotely match the requirements for the job and hope you will pick one of them.

This problem gets compounded in the areas of Regulatory, Clinical and Quality because people outside of these professions don't really understand what you do and don't know how to tell if someone has good experience or just has some buzzwords on a resume. So to make up for their lack of knowledge, they will send EVERYONE to you for you to screen, and it ends up taking up a lot of your valuable time.

A generalist recruiter is probably fine for filling admin or manufacturing production jobs, but they really struggle to be effective in a highly specialized area. Since RA, CA, and QA professionals are a unique bunch with very unique and sometimes misunderstood skills and duties, it's always helpful to deal with a recruiter that knows your industry and profession. So when the time comes that you need a recruiter to help you fill a critical position, interview them to find out if they are the right one to help you.

A portion of the interview can be done through simple observation. Do they spend time getting to know what you need this new hire to do? Do they try to find out what type of person would do well in the job and fit with the team? If they don't do that with you, chances are they won't be doing it with the job candidate either to help make a good match. Also, do they seem to have a grasp of what regulatory, clinical, or quality does and can speak somewhat intelligently about it? If they don't seem credible to you, they probably won't be very effective in luring a top performer to your job opportunity.

What questions should you ask a recruiter? Well, here are a few suggestions:

Ask about their specialty or focus and if they have placed RA, CA or QA people in the past – If this is a new area for them, they may use your search as a training exercise to learn, but if it's done poorly it could leave a bad impression with a possible job candidate and they will lose interest in your job opportunity even if another recruiter calls them about it.

Ask them about their background and how long they've been recruiting for these types of positions – It's probably okay if the recruiter has only been recruiting for a year or so if they have had some experience in your field prior to becoming a recruiter. And it's probably okay if they have been a recruiter for quite a while (5 or more years) and focused in your area. Ideally the recruiter should have experience working in, or with, people like yourself and has been recruiting for a while. By the way, did I mention that I was an R&D engineer and Marketing Manager in the medical device industry prior to becoming a recruiter in 1997?

Ask them to describe their search process and services – If they can't describe a thorough and logical plan of attack, or their big plan consists of just placing a few ads and waiting for a response, you should probably move on. This is usually the entire plan for some of the discount or rookie recruiters and will rarely give you the results you want. But hey, they're cheap!

Ask them about their follow-up procedures for both you and the job candidate (before and after the placement) – A good recruiter will have a plan to contact you during the search, as well as contacting you and the new hire for at least a few months after the placement. I actually contact both the person hired and the hiring manager on a set schedule during the first year after the placement to ensure it was a good fit for both parties and to protect the company's investment.

Ask them for references or letters of recommendation – With the popularity of sites like LinkedIn and others, you can usually see if someone has received some recommendations from people they've worked with. If not, they should still be able to provide a letter from a past client company to give you an idea of what that recruiter is like to work with. Ask for a couple of letters from past client companies and, if possible, from job candidates they've worked with in the past too. That way you will get a feel for how they work with possible job candidates when presenting them with an opportunity.

Choosing to work with the right recruiter will make the process of finding and hiring top talent a lot easier and faster for you. These 5 questions and how the recruiter answers them should give you a pretty good idea and feel for whether or not this is the right recruiter to help you.

If you have any questions or comments about these ideas, please contact me. I'd love to hear from you.

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