

You don't know me, but...

Tony Taylor of ATP Recruitment Limited considers the role of the Headhunter in the selection process.

Executive Search, more popularly known as 'Headhunting' is recruitment without recourse to advertising. During the course of the last 25 years, it has become more and more used in the UK as a means of filling top appointments.

Often shrouded in a rather unnecessary mystique, Search is a precise, structured and highly confidential method of identifying candidates who may not be seeking a career move.

Indeed, it has become a standard practice in industry, where it is estimated that over 90% of all top appointments are filled by the Headhunter.

Which consultant?

For the potential employer, the choice of which consultant to use is extremely important – many claim to be involved in Search, but the majority are merely using the description for status. Whilst confidentiality may preclude Search consultants from revealing their client portfolio, they should be able to demonstrate their expertise and a proven track record in the disciplines for which they are recruiting.

Adherence to an ethical code of practice should be ascertained. It is important to meet the consultant who will be handling the assignment and for him/her to prepare a detailed brief outlining the understanding (warts and all) of the appointment.

This should include not only the obvious information (such as remuneration package), but also take account of the cultural and operating style of the employer in all its aspects.

This written presentation should include the fee structure adopted by the consultancy. Fees for Search are cost effective in that they eliminate the unnecessary burden of advertising (with its unpredictable response) and management time – the Search consultant will normally present a shortlist of three candidates who have been thoroughly researched, appraised and (most importantly) who have expressed a positive interest in a continuing dialogue.

The first approach

The consultant uses this brief as the basis for research into the relevant sectors in order to identify specific target candidates, based on a known track record of achievement.

The uninvited telephone call ("You don't know me, but...") from the Headhunter should be taken as both flattering and significant. The consultant will introduce his/her organisation and will wish to establish their bona fides with the candidate. This will include writing to their private address and a suggestion

that both parties should meet informally for a confidential discussion.

A meeting will follow and the consultant will explore the background of the candidate in detail against the appointment in mind; the candidate must not be perturbed if the client is not identified at this first meeting.

Maintaining Confidentiality

Whilst the Search programme is under way, the consultant will keep the client informed of progress, although not necessarily discussing specific individuals; there exists, after all, a two fold obligation of confidentiality and this must include preserving the anonymity of the candidates until they agree to let their name go forward.

The Headhunter provides a cost effective, professional and ethical solution to recruiting

The shortlist presentation will give a detailed career history of the candidate, together with a technical assessment of their strengths and weaknesses following the consultant's interview programme.

The employer will then meet with the candidates, being aware that they have been approached directly as a result of search activities and have not "applied" for the appointment. In point of fact, this first meeting is best regarded as the opportunity for the exchange of ideas and philosophy and the more detailed negotiations should be pursued at a further meeting.

At this point, the consultant will be able to assist in the discussions and preparation of any offer of employment or partnership agreement.

The follow up

Once a candidate has joined a company or practice, the consultant will need to be satisfied that the appointment is proving to be advantageous for both parties. This will probably entail a visit to the client, some months after the appointment has been made, to establish that a successful "marriage" has been achieved.

Executive search is, of course, particularly appropriate for professional appointments where candidates can be sourced in a scientific manner.

Given the fact that competition for able and ambitious professionals is tough in all sectors (be it public practice, commerce, industry or the City), the approach of the Headhunter provides a cost effective, professional and ethical solution to recruiting requirements.

Many organisations are reluctant to be seen to be advertising senior

appointments when they may be "down sizing" their operation and the discreet technique of Search is particularly relevant under these circumstances.

Tony Taylor BA (Hons) FIRP FInstSMM has been involved in professional recruitment work for over 25 years and has travelled extensively throughout the world acting on behalf of clients ranging from small, independent companies through to large public corporations and government departments.

He has a particular interest in training and is dedicated to ensuring the highest professional standards are adopted throughout the recruitment industry. He regularly makes presentations on recruitment techniques and employment legislation.

He has appeared on television and radio on many occasions and has published articles on a range of management topics as well as football, (one of his other key interests). A member of The Kennel Club, he has judged gundogs at Championship Shows in the UK and Australia

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"Labour can do nothing without capital, capital can do nothing without labour, and neither labour nor capital can do anything without the guiding genius of management"

MacKenzie King 1917

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