ESTABLISHING THE "SENSE OF URGENCY"

One of the major strengths that Recruiters who are consistently ranked among the top producers in our industry have is the ability to clearly identify and qualify their client's *"sense of urgency"* about filling the open position(s). By doing so, the Recruiters are quickly able to focus their resources (time and energy) on orders/searches that justify this level of attention. This focusing of resources allows them to close more placements and have tighter productivity ratios than are the norm for our industry.

Contrast this with the typical Recruiter who may accept an *"ASAP"* response from their client in answer to a question about "how soon they need to fill the position". Unfortunately this response provides little on which to qualify the client's true sense of urgency. In order to do that properly, the Recruiter must carefully guide the client through a sequence of questions that may be similar to the following.

Why is this position open?
If it is an expansion position, determine from the client the basis for the expansion. The answer could provide good selling points for potential recruits or you may discover that it's just a "trial balloon" with limited long-term backing from the company. Alternatively, if it is a replacement for someone who has left the position, you need to determine if they were promoted (and is this position a usual stepping stone for promotion), transferred within the company (and why), or if they left the company altogether (was their departure voluntary or otherwise). If the position is open because of turnover, you need to discuss with the client the nature and cause of the turnover and whether or not it is a chronic problem for this position, department or division. The last thing you need is to become involved with is an employer who has a turnover problem that cannot be solved by improving their hiring practices.

Remember

Most turnover is not the result of an individual's inability to do their job. Rather, most turnover is due to an inability of well-intentioned people to work together effectively.

How long has the position been open?
The length of time the position has been open may indicate several things regarding the client's sense of urgency. If it is a newly created position, the client should have a specific target date at which time the position will be funded within their budget. If it is an existing position that has been open for a long period of time, this could indicate one of several different scenarios. First, the client is having a difficulty filling the position because they are unrealistic in their selection criteria. The client is having a difficulty filling the position because they and/or the opportunity are not attractive to potential employees. The client may not have invested adequate resources in filling the position because it is not a high priority for them. It is also possible that filling the position was not a high priority for the client until recently because of either internal or external factors. Also, variations on any or all of the above may be present. That is why it is necessary for you to ask additional questions.

How many candidates have they interviewed?
The number of candidates they have interviewed together with the length of time the position has been open may say volumes about their sense of urgency. As an example, if the position has been open for several months and they have not interviewed anyone to date, it may indicate a low sense of urgency or a change in priorities. Conversely, if they have interviewed many candidates and the position is still open it could be an indicator they lack a clearly defined set of job related selection criteria, are basically indecisive, or they have yet to find the right person. Once again, it's critical for properly qualifying the job order/search to further define the situation by asking additional questions.

How many offers have they extended?
If the client has interviewed candidates but not extended any offers, find out "why" they haven't. It may be that all the candidates interviewed are still in the preliminary stages of the selection process and consequently, they have not reached a point where an offer can be extended. However, it could also mean they have yet to interview any candidates who were both qualified and interested in the position. Most importantly, you need to determine if they have issued any offers that were rejected. If so, ask why the offer(s) were rejected. If they don't know or if you have any doubts about the reason(s), ask the client for the contact information on each candidate who has rejected an offer. Stress to them the fact that many times a candidate will not give a perspective employer the true reason for rejecting the offer. However, a professional recruiter is more likely to uncover the real reason(s), and thus provide critical feedback to the client that may prevent turndowns in the future.

Remember

If candidates have rejected employment offers from your client, you and the client can only benefit from knowing exactly "why" this has occurred. To proceed without this knowledge is tantamount to having a giant blind spot in your selection process, one that could seriously compromise the likelihood of a successful outcome.

Is there anyone currently in contention and if so, what is his or her status?
An obvious question and yet many recruiters do not ask it because they make the assumption the client would not be giving them the order/search if they were already serious about a candidate. In fact, many times, just the opposite is true. The client may be serious about a candidate but prior to a final decision, want to insure they're making the right decision by comparing your candidates with their own. Therefore, before you proceed, make certain you ask this question, including **the status of all internal candidates**. Be particularly thorough when probing this area, as many clients will be reluctant to discuss their internal possibilities with a third party source. That's all the more reason why you need to ask the question. Knowing the status of each candidate currently in contention will allow you to properly allocate your resources in direct proportion to the probability of making the placement.

In addition to your services, what sources have they used, are they using or do they plan to use in order to fill the position?
This is the final question to ask in determining both their sense of urgency as well as the level of competition if you agree to work with this client. Determine whether or not they have or plan to use other recruiters (specifically which firms), Internet postings, researchers, employee referrals, company website, or various other forms of advertising and sourcing. If they have been utilizing other sources, ask about the results to date (compare to answers of previous questions).

The information you gain from the answers to these questions is essential to the process of properly qualifying the order/search. Although clients may be reluctant to answer some of these questions, you should explain why it is in their best interest to do so if they wish to take full advantage of benefits your services can provide.

The answers to these questions together with developing an effective working relationship/hiring process, will allow you to better determine the proper priority for each order/search and ensure you apply the appropriate amount of time and resources. Establishing the client's "sense of urgency" is a key factor in making this determination.

*Terry Petra is available for one-on-one coaching, consulting and group training through **"Petra On Call"**, a cost effective approach to receiving the full benefit of his expertise. For details on Terry's products and services, including **"Business Appraisals"**, visit his web site at: www.tpetra.com. As always, if you have questions or comments about this article or wish to receive Terry's input on any other topic related to this business, your calls and e-mails are most welcome. Terry can be reached at (651) 738-8561 or e-mail him at Terry@tpetra.com.*