

## Indirect Recruiting – It’s All About Their Comfort Zone

Over the last month, I have been contacted by several Recruiters who are utilizing the indirect recruiting approach to gaining referrals. Each of them expressed frustration over the fact that many of the people they contacted were “uncomfortable” in providing referrals. On hearing this, my first question was “*Why were they uncomfortable?*” Surprisingly, most of the Recruiters did not know because they failed to ask the question. Rather, they immediately began to list for their contacts, the reasons “why” they should be willing to provide names of referrals.

With each of these Recruiters, I worked through a variety of options that could help develop a “comfort zone” for the person they were contacting.

We started with their opening presentation. In most instances, the Recruiters were moving too fast and selling too hard.

### **Remember**

Eighty percent of effective communication is dependent on “how” you say “what” you say while only twenty percent is dependent on the actual words that are used. Specifically, the speed at which you speak and the tone of your voice will determine more than any other factors, whether or not your message will be received in a positive manner.

Once the Recruiters slowed down and concentrated on “how” they were saying “what” they were saying, they immediately began to achieve better results. This alone created an expansion in the “comfort zone” of the people they were calling.

Next we reviewed their indirect recruiting scripts. They needed to be reminded that, at its core, indirect recruiting is a call for help. Therefore, why not state it in their opening comments, i.e., “*I have a problem and I need your help.*” This can be said in a number of different ways and generally is a great attention-getter. Blending this concept into the opening comments of their scripts improved their ability to gain the contact’s attention while helping to eliminate a reflex rejection. This approach also helps to expand the contact’s “comfort zone” during the initial part of the call as it places them in the position of a potential problem solver.

Once they have the contact’s attention, most Recruiters fall into the same trap. They review the selling points of the position and then ask for referrals of people who may be interested (or some variation on that theme). This is where the contact’s “comfort zone” can quickly evaporate because it places them in a position where they have to consider the motivations of other people. Confronted with the stress connected with making judgments about others, they move into an avoidance mode and make statements like:

*“I don’t know anyone who is looking.”*

**Or**

*“I don’t know anyone who would be interested.”*

**Or**

*“I’m uncomfortable in giving you referrals until I have spoken with the individuals and know they are interested in speaking with you.”*

Many of these responses can be avoided if the Recruiter does not describe the selling points of the position. Rather, they should describe to their contact the critical qualifying criteria required by their client followed by:

*“Who do you know who may be qualified for this position?”*

If the contact is still “uncomfortable” about providing names, you need to ask “why?” At this point, just listen and, if necessary, ask additional probing questions about their concerns. Don’t even attempt to convince them to cooperate until you have carefully heard them out. Whether you realize it or not, by allowing them to express their concerns, you are also providing them an opportunity to vent their emotions, thus relieving stress while reestablishing their “comfort zone.”

### **Remember**

Studies have validated that up to 80% of all employees who VOLUNTARILY change positions were not actively seeking a different position when the new opportunity was introduced to them.

Their introduction to the new position could come from a variety of sources including their present company, associates, customers, friends, relatives, and of course, Recruiters. My personal observations, from over thirty four years in this business, supports the findings of this research.

Keeping this in mind, if your contact says they “don’t know anyone who is looking,” you could respond,

*“That doesn’t surprise me since nearly 80% of all people who voluntarily change positions were not looking for another job when the new opportunity was introduced to them. That’s why I focus my networking on individuals (or use a functional title) that may be potentially qualified. If, during our discussion, they express an interest in learning more about the opportunity, we can get into details at that time.”*

*“Does that seem to be a reasonable approach?”*

If your contact’s “comfort zone” is still constricted, you may want to further frame your call in the following context:

*“If you had the chance to confidentially compare your present position with an opportunity outside your company, wouldn’t you want to take advantage of it, particularly if all that was involved was a preliminary phone discussion with a recruiter?”*

If they answer “no,” ask why not. If they shut you down at this point, it’s probably best to gracefully end the discussion and move on. Nevertheless, document your discussion because you may want to call this individual again in the future.

However, if they say “yes” or “possibly,” restate your closing question.

*“Good, then you can understand the mindset of anyone I may contact. That’s why I’m asking for your help. Who do you know who may be qualified based on the criteria I referenced earlier?”*

At this point, don't be surprised if your contact still has difficulty in coming up with referrals. After all, they weren't prepared for your call and their "comfort zone" may be restricting their creative thinking. Therefore, expand their "comfort zone" by arranging a follow-up call. Stating something similar to the following may be effective.

*"Since you weren't expecting my call today, why don't you take a couple of days to consider our discussion? Just keep it in mind. Perhaps you will think of someone who could benefit from speaking with me. I could call you back on (state specific date and time not more than two business days out). Will that work for you? Is there an alternate number for me to call that would be more convenient for you?"*

In most instances, if you have gotten this far in your discussion, the contact will generally agree to the follow-up call.

In monitoring statistics from those recruiters who utilize this approach, we see that approximately two thirds of the referrals they receive come as a result of the second call. The reason is that by having them agree to "keep it in mind" along with the expectation of a follow-up call, you have established an implied obligation on their part to help you out. Then, as the allotted time passes, their heightened consciousness will, many times, allow them to identify possible referrals that otherwise would not be obvious to them. All of this can take place without disturbing their "comfort zone".

Very importantly, in order to build on your credibility, make certain you call back at the precise time and date agreed upon.

Another obstacle to receiving referrals is when the individual you contact ask,

*"Why should I give you referrals (names)?"*

**Or**

*"What's in it for me?"*

Although reflecting a certain degree of cynicism, both of these are fair questions and you need to be prepared to answer. Possible responses could include one or a combination of the following.

*"One of the primary reasons individual's such as yourself provide referrals is that by doing so, they gain the deep satisfaction that comes from knowing they are providing an opportunity for someone they know to potentially benefit from taking a step forward in their career."*

**Or**

*"As a professional recruiter, my area of specialization is (name your specialty). This is my entire focus. My role is to provide a service that brings together (functional titles) with the appropriate career opportunities. In doing so, I carefully develop a cross referenced network of contacts within this specialty, individuals such as yourself, and this allows me to be of value in a number of different ways. From assisting (functional titles) in moving their careers forward, to serving as a sounding board and source for career benchmarking information, the professionals who are included in my network literally have a willing expert available to them on an as needed basis. Can you see the benefit you could receive from being part of this network?"*

Or

*“By providing referrals you will have done a favor for me as well as for the individuals you would refer. I take favors seriously and, as a professional recruiter whose area of specialization is in your career field, I might very well be in a position to return the favor at some time in the future. That is a benefit that could prove to be of tremendous value. Can you see the possibilities?”*

Keeping in mind that you can never totally predict human behavior and that indirect recruiting requires the voluntary cooperation of the individuals you contact, being prepared to understand and expand their “comfort zone,” will greatly improve your likelihood of success. Project yourself into the position of the individual you are contacting and ask yourself: “Does my approach restrict or contract their comfort zone?” The answer to that question should guide you in the further development of your indirect recruiting approach.

One final thought. When the individual you contact, on an indirect recruiting call gives you a referral (name), the next thing you should say is,

*“Thank you. Who else would you recommend I contact?”*

It’s truly amazing how frequently recruiters fail to ask for additional referrals. After all, if they are willing to provide you with one referral, you obviously are working within their “comfort zone.” Don’t miss the opportunity to further benefit from this positioning.

As always, if you have questions or comments about this subject, just let me know. Your calls and e-mails are always welcome.



*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](http://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](mailto:Terry@tpetra.com).*