

Candidate Decision Making

Presenter: Kent Burns, President of Simply Driven Executive Search, a member of the Sanford Rose Associates® Network of Companies

Kent Burns leads Simply Driven Executive Search, a member of the Sanford Rose Associates network of offices. He specializes in delivering high-calibre talent in the areas of Finance/Accounting and Engineering. For over eight years, Kent was a Partner and perennial top producer within a global network of recruiters. In 2003, he was the Top-Producing Individual Account Executive, outperforming approximately 3,500 recruiters worldwide. Prior to entering the search industry, Kent was a CPA with two Big Four firms as well as a corporate Controller and Chief Financial Officer.

He is the author of *What's Your Why?* and *The Why Guide to Your First Job - College Edition*. He has been featured in publications such as Fast Company, Forbes, CFO Magazine, HR Magazine, The Journal of Accountancy, The Boston Globe, Reuters, The Houston Chronicle, The Indianapolis Business Journal and the St. Louis Post-Dispatch. In this presentation, Kent shares Simply Driven's best practices for managing a candidate's decision-making process to accept your offer.

Meeting: "Candidate Decision Making" by Kent Burns

If you are reviewing this episode with a team, watch the entire Episode and ask your group for their key takeaways and insights. Review the following below to fill in the gaps.

(Facilitator): Much training related to the search and placement process revolves around effective recruiting techniques, overcoming resistance, securing new clients, and negotiation. How much training exists on how to truly consult with candidates and clients throughout the decision-making process! Not much – until now! Let's take some time to go through each of the areas Kent covered.

Discussion Point #1: This is a decision-making process, not an event. Instead of the candidate subconsciously taking this decision seriously only when an offer is in hand, weave in questions throughout the entire process. Below are a few to get started; what others could you add?

- *"What new things have surfaced since we last spoke? What opportunities, or conversations, have appeared?"*
- *"How did you end the interview – how did they leave it with you in terms of next steps? What was the timeframe?"*
- *"Who else would you want to meet with (within the company) that you haven't yet had the chance to meet with?"*
- *"Besides compensation, what else is important to you in this decision that we haven't yet talked about?"*
- *"This is more than likely a (quick, 30 day, 60 day) process – what else is going on personally or professionally that will possibly present a problem during that time?"*
- *"Who else do you feel needs to get involved with this decision? Spouse?"*
- *"If the company called me up and said 'we want to hire you', what questions need to be answered in order for you to say 'yes'?"*

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Discussion Point #2: Always assume an offer is coming. There is a fine line to balance between a candidate's ego being inflated and taking the assumptive route, but we can walk that line delicately.

To keep the ego in check:

- *“Did they give you any indication of how you compared with other candidates they were considering?”*
- *“How did they express their interest in you?”*
- *“Were there any areas of the interview that you felt you could have covered better, or any subjects that you don't feel you were able to convey your skills and abilities in sufficient detail?”*
- *“Are there any important capabilities or experiences that you have that you, in hindsight, think are important areas that should be covered with the client?”*
- *“Do you think they have any concerns? In other words, no fit is ever 100% perfect – what possible hesitations do you think the hiring manager may have?”*
- *“In your opinion, and so I can reiterate with the client when I speak with him/her, think about what you now know they are looking for in their next hire. Why do you think you are the best one for the role?”*
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To pre-close on offer and acceptance:

“Okay, before I go do what I do best, let me leave you with one request. I'm going to call you back, and between now and when I do, I want you to be thinking about this offer that you've just crafted for yourself. When I call you back, I will either share with you that the client has opted to move forward with others and that an acceptable offer couldn't be made, or I will share with you that the job is yours, we got you at or above what you were needing, and congratulations and job well done!

Between now when we hang up the phone, and when I call you back, I want you to pretend that the actual offer is in front of you. Talk to your family, talk to yourself, talk to your mentor, talk to your accountant, go through whatever steps you feel you need to go through to be ready to accept when I call you back. I know that you will need time to think, but what I'm asking is that you use this time as that time. When I get off the phone with (hiring manager), he's going to be excited to hear from you, and he will become less

excited and less confident in his decision to hire you if hours or days or a week goes by. Does that sound fair?"

Discussion Point #3: Kent raises a great point, which is that a candidate's career impacts his or her life in three primary buckets – personal, professional and financial. How can you help a candidate determine at the beginning of the process what is critically important for each of those buckets, before they get emotionally invested in the perceived gravity of a decision of switching organizations? What questions can you ask, in addition to those below?

Personal:

- *How satisfied are you with your balance in life? Why?*
- *How much vacation time do you receive? Do you take all of it each year? If you don't, why?*
- *How many hours a week do you have to work to get your job done well? How could that improve?*
- *Where are you from originally? Do your parents still live there? Where is your spouse from? Would you consider, or have you ever talked about, relocating back to any of those areas?*
- *At what times, or in what situations, have you had to prioritize work over family? Why?*
- *When you come home at the end of the day, do you feel charged up from the day and excited to see your family, or pretty drained and exhausted from the craziness of your day? How could that improve?*
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Professional:

- *No matter if you've been there a year or 20 years, the company today is different than when you started, would you agree? How has your firm changed since you started?*
- *Think about those things that initially attracted you to the organization – what were they? Have any of the things that brought you there, changed over the years?*
- *Knowing what you know now, having worked there for (# of) years, let's just say that tomorrow you were unemployed. Would you reapply? Would it be the ONLY place you would apply, or would you also consider other opportunities? Why?*
- *When people leave your company, what are the reasons?*
- *What's a 7 that could be a 10? Every company does certain things well, but what is good that could be even better?*
- *When you are venting to your spouse after work, or to your peers at happy hour, what are you typically frustrated with? Are there reoccurring vents that never seem to change?*
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Financial:

- *When is your next review? When was your last review? How satisfied were you with the feedback and promotions that happened at that time?*
- *How do you feel about your financial progress to date? Are you where you thought you would be?*
- *How are you financially limited? How could a new position or company potentially help you overcome those limitations?*
- *Would you be open to considering opportunities that might prepare you to move up faster than you are currently positioned?*
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Discussion Point #4: The counteroffer. The emotional rollercoaster of all rollercoasters – for all involved! Take the script below and modify however needed; this is not the time to “wing” your discussion and the script below covers all bases of financial, emotional, and “best week ever” counteroffers. As Kent said, changing jobs is a big decision. It demands an intentional approach – be intentional! Have a process – you owe it to your candidates and to your clients.

“When you go in and resign, you are going to receive a counteroffer. You are a good candidate and they are going to be scrambling to find someone who can do what you’ve done. What I want to share with you are simply the three things to expect in that situation and why to expect them. The decision is always yours as to how to handle the extension of a counteroffer, but I want to make sure it’s an educated decision.

There are three types of counteroffers that you will receive, and the first one is probably the one you are envisioning – it’s a financial counteroffer. What happens 10 seconds after what you’ve said to your boss has now sunk in, and I’ll tell you exactly what he’s thinking while he’s nodding and listening to you talk about how much you appreciate the opportunity and hope he respects your decision. He’s thinking ‘how fast and how am I going to be able to backfill her position, are others going to doubt their opportunity here too and follow, is this going to put additional work on my plate – I hope not because I’m overloaded as it is...let me think of what I can do to salvage this.’ And what’s the easiest and quickest solution? Money.

The first question that’s always asked is ‘how much are they paying you.’ If you share with him that number, it’s guaranteed that he will match or exceed it. If you don’t want to stay at the company, which you’ve told me you don’t, then I would suggest not sharing with him your offer – but here’s why. He exceeds the offer – and you still turn it down. Uncomfortable for you, and irritating for him. He is going to continue to find a solution, of which there is none – based on what you’ve shared with me. So quite simply, it will just be less uncomfortable for you if you don’t disclose your offer.

The second amount that will be calculated, after you turn the first one down, should be an amount significantly higher than the amount it will cost them to backfill your position.



So you are making \$80,000 right now, and the offer is for \$90,000, which means that they will not be able to hire someone to fill your role from a competitor unless they make that kind of offer. So \$10,000, plus \$30,000 for the fee that they will pay a recruiter, and let's just leave out the risk of that person not being as good as you or them having to pay to relocate someone in. So, the second number, if it's not a raise higher than \$40,000, they are saving money by having you stay.

Now, if they do offer you \$40,000, and again I wouldn't accept anything less than that – I get that you'll have a hard time turning that down. I would too.

What I would suggest, if I were you, is to ask the employer to sign a document guaranteeing their employment for at least the next year, and that still entitles you to any scheduled bonuses or raises during that time. The reason I suggest that is because nearly every time a candidate I've worked with has stayed, they are gone from the company within a year. Why? Because they are now paying you \$120,000 for a job that yesterday they were paying you \$80,000 to do.

They have bought themselves time to find a replacement, not have an urgent and critical search that requires a recruiter, and eventually find someone who is your backup – all while having you still perform in your role and have no downtime. They also don't get a bonus that year – because the company claims it was rolled in to the amount they got when trying to resign. So to cover yourself from that situation, it would be wise to not accept that \$40,000 unless there is an employment contract attached to it. Even if you do, it may not help the stigma of your future loyalty being suspect and them feeling backed into a corner.

So the financial counteroffer is the one that most anticipate, and for good reason. I want to share with you the second counteroffer you'll receive – and it's possibly even more difficult than the first – which is the emotional counteroffer. What this will sound like is 'I'm so surprised, I thought you were happy here, how could you leave your team right now, they are relying on you, I just had you and your wife over for dinner recently, I would have never thought you'd do this, the project you are working on will crumble'...and so on.

Here's why this is so tough – because you've built relationships with these individuals, and nothing should take away from that. However, the true friends that you've made there will be friends with you outside of the walls of (company), and they would want what was best for you, no matter the situation. The president of your organization is running a business, and I'm sure he's had to let people go or lay people off in the past and hated doing it – but he had to because it was in the best interest of the company. No different than your career – if you hold on to where you are because of not wanting to feel bad, your career will nosedive just like the company would if they went bankrupt because they never wanted to lay people off and feel bad about it. There is never, ever going to be a good time to leave – if there was, and you were sitting around with nothing to do, you'd probably be let go anyways!

That being said, you've seen other people resign in the past, and I'm sure it's surprising how quickly someone else is up and running in that spot. Your boss is paid to solve problems – and hiring your replacement is part of what he's paid for. It doesn't mean that the emotional connections you've made with people aren't important – it just means that they shouldn't govern the direction of your career.”

Here's the last thing to be prepared for, and it's what I refer to as the “Best Week Ever”. What it will look like is this – you will go in, you will resign, they'll tell you that they love



you and respect you and will miss you, and they hope that your paths will cross again down the road, and then you walk out of the office thinking you are home free.

What you experience in the next two weeks are the best two weeks that you've ever had throughout your entire employment. You magically get moved to a corner office, you get put on your dream project, it's announced that low and behold, the promotion that wasn't available to you now is a possibility. People are taking you to lunch, there's an endless supply of "we'll miss you" happy hours and parties. It's employment bliss. So what I want you to be prepared for is the situation where you feel as though things were handled well, but gear up for the magical circumstances that are going to fall into place in the coming days – and know that it's designed to have you doubt your decision and reconsider. Now, if these next few weeks were actually the norm, you probably would have never been open to looking at other opportunities in the first place.

But it's not the norm, and I know that you know the honeymoon can't last forever – and everything will go back to normal in a few weeks or months. But again, be prepared for the best few weeks of employment bliss – on top of the financial and emotional ploys as well."