

The Battle for Top Talent

By MK Stalder

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Improving the hiring process is critical in helping companies compete for the best talent, and, in the future, the competition will be fiercer. In fact, by 2011, the U.S. Department of Labor’s Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that the economy will need 10 million more workers than will be available.

Are you ready to compete for top talent? Are your internal recruiters building a fortress around the recruiting function and making it a hassle for candidates to get in? If so, the best candidates will have the least tolerance and will drop out first.

The best candidates don’t always have matching skills, and companies can cheat themselves by insisting on exact experience. They may overlook people with intangible assets who are enthusiastic, motivated and will ultimately outperform someone who is more familiar with the position, and therefore bored with the job.

Invest your time in what you do well.

In a healthy market, it’s difficult to find qualified candidates because everyone is working (which is, of course, ideal). In such cases, the qualified talent pool is passive. They are not actively seeking a new position, their resumes are not posted on the web sites, nor are they looking at job postings. On the

other hand, agencies have the relationships with the talent pool and can drive candidates to you. They can save clients the time and effort involved in finding people, allowing them to focus on their expertise. Agencies have the contacts and the resources to find top talent.

Alternatively, in a weaker market, the best people are hard to find. You must weed through, literally, what can be thousands of resumes to find those few “needles in the haystack” everyone wants. Personnel agencies do exactly that – saving you time and productivity that should be spent on your job. Agencies screen thousands of resumes, evaluate the candidates, test skills, check references, run background checks and qualify candidates so the company will spend a limited amount of time in the hiring process.

Bottom line – it’s the personnel agency’s job to find the talent and bring the best to you.

Currently we’re in a healthy economy with no signs of a slow down. It’s predicted, as the baby boomers retire, that the talent pool will become more shallow, and it will be imperative for companies to have relationships with recruiters.



Five tips on finding the right recruiter for you and your company:

Get to know your recruiters. Learn about their service, their standing in the community, their philosophy about what they do and their history in the market.

Ask questions. How do they find their candidates? What does their interview process consist of? Do they conduct background checks? Who are their references?

Find out about their industry qualifications. The better services will hold a membership in their local association, and be certified (i.e., possess a Certified Personnel Consultant or a Certified Temporary Specialist). This is your assurance that they are serious about their business, they have a code of ethics by which to measure/monitor themselves and they know the laws, rules and regulations that pertain to their industry.

Check experience. They should have three or more years experience, or be working in a firm with knowledge of the employment market.

Communicate expectations. Make sure the individual you are considering understands the depth of the responsibility they have to the client and to candidates.

Five tips in matching the right candidate and job description:

Be clear about the needs of the job. Identify what attributes, behaviors and motivators will be needed to do the job. This will ensure that you are looking for the critical “people skills” required.

Weed out candidates who will not fit the job. Once you know which characteristics will be needed, you will write more specific employment ads and give clearer instructions to recruiters. This will reduce the number of “not-a-chance” applicants you receive. Ask more specific interview questions. This, too, will lessen the volume of those “not-a-chance” interviewees.

Separate candidates who are skilled interviewers from truly great-fit candidates. It isn't the best person who gets the job – it's the person who knows how to interview best who gets the position. Ask questions to determine how the person handles problems or people. Do they prefer a calm, steady



work pace or a place that's buzzing with activity? Are they more motivated by getting and seeing results or by helping others? What are their attitudes when it comes to customer service or developing others or being a self starter?

Always ask open-ended questions. You will find out how the person thinks, converses and solves problems. Too often the agency receives feedback from candidates who have been on an interview in which the interviewer did most of the talking. Telling the candidate about the job is good, but how does that help you learn anything about the candidate?

Reduce the risk of hiring the wrong candidate. Conduct background checks, education checks, personality profiles and drug screening.

With most companies, labor is the biggest expense line item. Hiring the wrong person can cost your company a tremendous amount of money and loss of productivity. Staffing agencies follow rigorous screening procedures for temporary personnel and direct hires, increasing opportunities to get the right fit. Reduce your hiring risks and look at all of your options. **N**

You decide how you want to spend your time.

MK Stalder is the owner/principal of MK Personnel, a boutique personnel service specializing in the placement of administrative, clerical, office support, and accounting staff. With 11 years of previous experience, she opened MK Personnel, a highly productive agency focused on the Houston employment market, in 1993. Ms. Stalder is the recipient of the local association's Top Producer Award for 16 years and the State Association's for five years. She was honored as a Woman On The Move® by the Texas Executive Women in 2003. MK can be reached via email mk@mkpersonnel.com.