

Quarterly Commentary

By Karen Daubs, Director of Business Development

“Handle With Care”

Because my practice specializes exclusively and entirely in the Independent marketplace, I’m often reminded just how small of a world we work in. As I have hundreds of conversations each week with people in this very focused niche -some long-time contacts, others, new referrals-I’m seeing an alarming trend that companies (and recruiters too) need to be aware of.

The hiring switch is back in the “on” position and it doesn’t appear as though it’s going to be shut off anytime soon. We are busier than ever and so too are many companies in their hiring efforts. As a result there are a lot of candidates in process and the challenges of identifying the truly great is a constant. At the same time, it’s imperative for us to always remember that all candidates, regardless of qualifications, are people and we should be respectful of how we are treating them even if they aren’t a fit for what we need professionally.

I’m not sure if it’s because we’ve become busy, complacent or just plain unaware, but poor candidate management throughout the interview lifecycle is creating negative perceptions in the marketplace. We cannot ignore the “takeaways” that candidates have when they are interviewing with us. People talk and in my practice these people are Presidents, COO’s, CMO’s and big-time decision makers at companies. I firmly believe that if organizations and recruiters knew the negative “vibe” they are perhaps innocently creating in the marketplace, they would be shocked, rattled and highly concerned about their reputation. Think about all the people you’ve received resumes from in recent times. How are you responding to those inquires or referrals? How are you managing interview set-up, feedback or release of candidates? Are you nervous about the message those people are telling pretty much anyone who will listen?

Examples of recent hiring missteps I’ve heard about:

- As a candidate asked the hiring manager about next steps in the interview process, the hiring manager responded- “Well the way we see it, this is a buyer’s market so we’re going to take as long as we want because there are plenty of people to go around these days.” Needless to say the highly successful, long-tenured candidate decided to bow out of the process as the perceived arrogance displayed by the hiring manager sent up a huge red flag.
- A CCO candidate interviewed over the course of three months with a company (not my client). He really liked what he knew of the organization so he was willing to take the countless hours and days off of work to participate in the lengthy, haphazard interview process. After the final interview, a week passed by without any feedback. Finally the HR contact from the company called and said, “Great news! We’re going to be making you an offer! We’ll have details and numbers for you tomorrow.” Obviously the candidate was excited. Three days pass without word then finally the HR contact sent an e-mail saying, “So sorry- we decided to promote an internal candidate. We’ll keep you in mind for future

needs however.” Once again, this high-level candidate feels bitter and is now uninhibited in sharing his frustration with friends, close confidants and even recruiters he just met.

- The all-too-common- “I took time off work- went out and interviewed with the company then never heard back from the recruiter or the company. Nothing!”

I whole-heartedly recognize perception is not always reality. There is no doubt interviewing is often a highly emotional process. Rejection and frustration can cause people to go on the defensive and exaggerate the circumstances in their favor. That being said, exaggerations and negative accounts of companies spread like wildfire. Right, wrong or otherwise, competitive intelligence is a major component of business survival and companies love to get the “scoop” on their competition, especially when that scoop is more or less “dirt.”

Some friendly reminders that will portray professionalism, courtesy and class when hiring:

- When interview times are set, do your very best to honor those scheduled calls and meetings. Constant rescheduling because “something came up” gives the impression that your time is more important than the candidate’s and that hiring is really not a priority.
- “No” is *far better* than no response. Stringing candidates along or keeping them in the dark shows a lack of respect for their time. If a candidate is no longer under consideration, tell them. If they have committed any amount of time to your hiring process, a phone call can go a long way. If their resume is not on-point with a need, a simple e-mail (even one created off of a template) is better than nothing.
- Efficient and timely hiring processes help gain interest and build buy-in. No longer are highly qualified candidates sitting and waiting for one job offer. Instead, it is more typical that our candidates have multiple offers at decision time. Keeping momentum intact thwarts second-guessing, offer turndown, and counteroffer acceptance. Having a well-defined process also exhibits whether or not your organization is operationally sound and offers a glimpse into what the candidate is in for should they go work for you. Are you putting your best foot forward at all times?
- Finally, setting appropriate expectations on the front end of a search can save a lot of worry and headaches. If you anticipate that candidates will need to interview on multiple occasions or the process will take several months to unfold, tell candidates that upfront. If a hiring process is going to be delayed or put on hold because of tricky scheduling issues or budgetary setbacks, let candidates know. Knowing ahead of time what your hiring process entails and providing honest and timely updates will minimize frustration and keep interest in your favor.