

Recruiter as Strategic Advisor

The Woefully Neglected Strategy that can Dramatically
Improve Recruiting Results

by
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Off With Their Heads



When in doubt
it's off with their heads

It's the least I can do
off with their heads

Is the only phrase that always rings true

Never gets old

So I say to you

With conviction

Off with their heads.

Queen of Hearts from Disney's "Alice in Wonderland"

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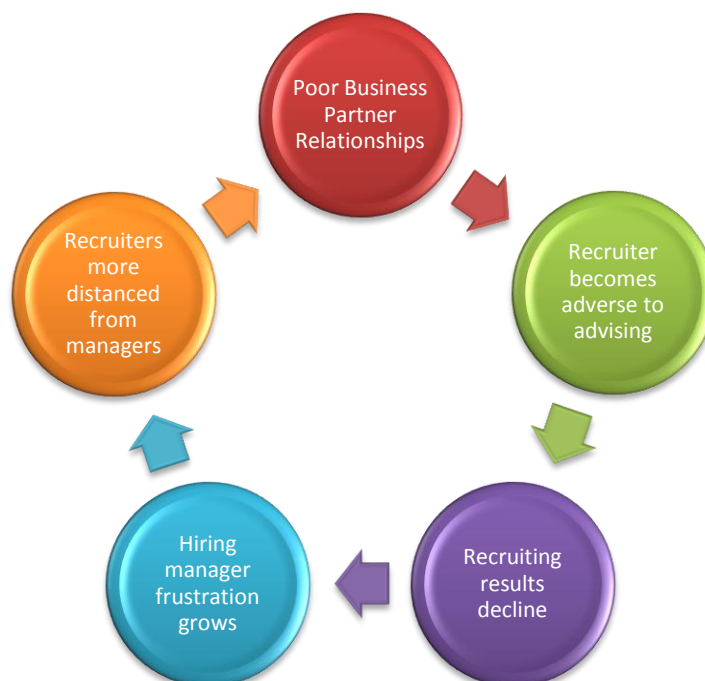
Introduction

Whenever we're engaged help a company fill critical positions or streamline their recruiting function, we almost always find the same situation—positions open for a long time, frustrated hiring managers, recruiters trying hard but struggling to meet expectations.

It's disconcertingly common to hear hiring managers say they feel the only solution to the problems with recruiting would be to fire all the recruiters and just start all over again. Yet some version of that "solution" is dreamed of by many hiring managers in companies of all sizes all around the country.

If you were to do a survey of your hiring managers, while they might stop short of "off with their heads," they probably do have significant concerns and frustration. A survey of recruiters would probably reveal significant concerns and frustrations as well. They share those occasional dreams of "off with their heads" though they are thinking of a different group!

The Cycle that Results in Declining Recruiting Success



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Signs Your Recruiting is experiencing this Problem

Perhaps you've heard some of these almost universal complaints about recruiting in your organization:

- Time to fill is too long
- Hiring managers do not feel they see enough qualified candidates
- Recruiters are frustrated because hiring managers do not get back to them
- Hiring managers do not give enough feedback on the candidates they interview or resumes they receive
- Recruiters do not have sufficient time with a hiring manager to discuss a new requisition so inappropriate candidates get presented; the search may stop and start over a long time, etc.
- Recruiters are frustrated because hiring managers do not follow the agreed-upon "process"
- Hiring managers would not give their recruiters high marks on a recruiting satisfaction survey
- Recruiters have sagging morale and feel unappreciated because hiring managers do not seem to value their expertise

Example That May Sound Familiar

While doing searches for a large company where the "off with their heads" hiring manager sentiment was really beginning to build, I was talking to a recruiter who revealed how demoralized she was. Despite having been a recruiter for several years and doing what she thought was good work, she had just been told that her upcoming performance review was going to be quite negative. Her hiring managers were very unhappy with her, and were complaining loudly and frequently to the VP HR who managed the recruiting function.

So the recruiter and I looked at the reality of one of the searches she had been doing for one of her most critical hiring managers. There was no denying the time to fill was embarrassing long, especially painful and visible since this was such a mission-critical position for that hiring manager.

In discussing the history of the search, two things were clear.

1. She was nearly terrified of the hiring manager, and never talked to him unless things were blowing up. She didn't have a business partnership with him, didn't think he respected her and would never think of doing any "push back."
2. She had actually filled the job 4 times in the last couple of months!

There had been four people the hiring manager liked enough to make an offer. In a sense, she had actually filled the job four times while having the reputation of not being able to get the job done!

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All the offers had been turned down. The candidates declined because the position wasn't sufficiently exciting to get them to leave their current job, the compensation was not competitive and/or the company did not move fast enough to land the candidate.

So while the recruiter had important information that should have been shared with the hiring manager, she was not able to have that critical conversation. Their relationship had deteriorated to the point where she avoided him, and he discounted her perspective and advice.

Of course the VP HR was frustrated with the hiring manager's complaints to her, and what was seen as the recruiter's inability to get the position filled. The VP continually asked the recruiter to "push back" with the hiring manager, but of course the recruiter was convinced there was no way she was going to try that! The only solution the VP though she had was to do a negative review for the recruiter.

The Essential Shifts to Boost Recruiting Results

It's obviously so critical to increase recruiting results today, because of and in spite of, all of today's pressures and challenges in businesses.

In order to get any meaningful results, the recruiting function must:

- Shift recruiter mindsets and skills sets from "order takers" to "decision influencers".
- Recognize that "strategic" must become part of the recruiter skillset.
- While still important, tactical recruiting activities such as doing postings, reading resumes, etc., must be supplemented by a trusted advisor relationship.

The Critical Success Factor for Recruiters

Over the last 7+ years, we have done a significant number of searches for individual recruiter positions to VP Talent Acquisition roles. In **every one** of those searches, the hiring manager has indicated the first and most important thing for the new recruiter to do was to build strong business partner relationships with their hiring managers.

When engaged to evaluate existing recruiting functions to understand why the results are so poor and everyone is frustrated, we find the same irony. Broken relationships that are at the root of many of the perceived issues with recruiting.

When hiring new people for their recruiting function, hiring managers almost always say the most important requirement is to build strong business partner relationships with their hiring managers.

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Recruiters and hiring managers often have weak, even dysfunctional, business partner relationships. Poor relationships can create recruiting problems and great relationships can be the solutions to them. Yet it is the one strategy that is poorly executed by recruiters.

Clearly everyone recognizes the importance of this relationship. So how come those relationships are so broken?

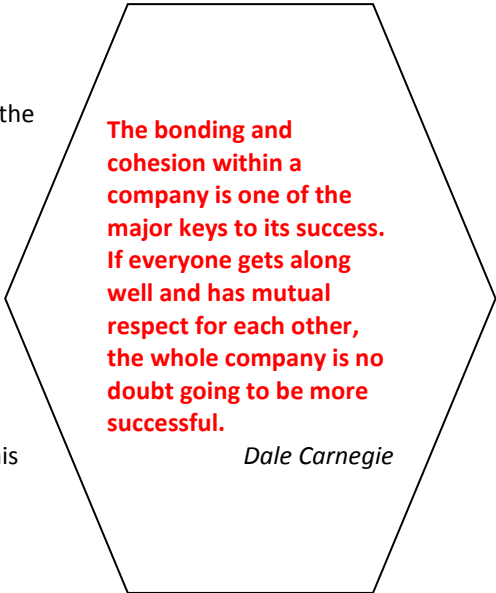
Business Only Gets Done Through Relationships

Successful people believe their success is attributable to a pattern of mutually beneficial interpersonal relationships, as much as it is due to technical skills or business knowledge.

“If either your needs for relatedness with others or your relationship with the organization is thwarted, your productivity and satisfaction will also be thwarted. Improving both types of relationships is important for sustained high performance.” *Susan Fowler, a senior consulting partner with The Ken Blanchard Companies*

It’s ironic that this most critical skill of building strong relationships within an organization is rarely if ever taught. Perhaps it’s because it seems like this should be a simple and intuitive activity for everyone.

Some people are able to easily create powerful business partnership relationships.



The bonding and cohesion within a company is one of the major keys to its success. If everyone gets along well and has mutual respect for each other, the whole company is no doubt going to be more successful.

Dale Carnegie

How do you know if people on your recruiting team are not able to easily and naturally build relationships? You will be experiencing the recruiting issues discussed above.

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Why Today's Recruiters Must be Talent Advisors

According to a report by Corporate Leadership Council, *Building Next Generation Recruiter Capabilities*, 2010:

"Now more than ever, recruiters need to be {Strategic} Talent Advisors. The capabilities of these next-generation recruiters encompass process expertise, talent pipeline management, and strategic advisory capabilities, with a particularly heavy emphasis on the latter.

- "...Recruiting is forced to hire for...fast-changing job requirements.
- The employed are more passive and less likely to consider new employment opportunities
- High unemployment rates have created more work for recruiting.
- At the same time, recruiting faces declining budgets, higher workloads, and more complexity.
- The new recruiting environment is driving down the quality and service provided by many recruiting organizations."

"Yet only 19% of recruiters today are proficient as Talent Advisors, and only 35% of hiring managers believe that Recruiting effectively influences business decisions."

Corporate Leadership Council

Ironically the solution to many of the problems in recruiting is to build strong business partner relationships between hiring managers and their recruiters.

Why Recruiters Aren't Functioning as Strategic Talent Advisors

Without a business partnership relationship with their hiring managers, recruiters won't have much opportunity to do any of the strategic talent advisor activities.

Because the criticality of real business partnerships between recruiters and hiring managers is obvious, recruiters are told to "be more consultative," "push back," "play the trusted advisor role", etc.

These certainly seem obvious, but the reality is that those are fuzzy mandates. Recruiters usually respond in one of two ways:

- a) Confused and worried about their job performance and future, or
- b) Convinced they are doing exactly what is being asked and confused about why they are being asked to do more.

So recruiters are confused and the needle on hiring manager satisfaction is not moved at all.

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What Do Your Recruiters Really Enjoy?

The first response of most recruiters will be things like the hunt for great candidates, finding the perfect person for the job, helping someone get into a great new job, etc.

It's rare for anyone to have a first response along the lines of liking to work with hiring managers to find new employees, talking about workforce strategy with hiring managers, etc.

Once recruiters know how to create strategic business partnerships with their hiring managers that will be something they truly enjoy— a big change from what they currently enjoy.

Strategic Recruiting Characteristics Checklist

Here are just some of the behaviors you will see when recruiters are enabled to be strategic talent advisors. How many are operational in your organization?

- Hiring managers accept and even ask for recruiting and talent management advice.
- Hiring managers listen to recruiter's perspective around which candidate is the best hire.
- Hiring managers respond to recruiter requests on a mutually-acceptable agreed-upon timeline.
- Hiring managers spend time with recruiters as requested, discussing new talent needs, market conditions, etc.
- Recruiters are included in hiring manager workforce planning and decisions.
- Recruiters can deliver "bad news" without having to resort to a push-back stance.
- Recruiters and hiring managers partner to make the staffing decisions.
- Even though there are challenges in filling positions, recruiters and hiring managers work together to come up with the best solutions.
- Recruiters have the tools and training that support them as strategic advisors.

Is it really possible that positioning recruiters as strategic advisors would help solve many of the perceived recruiting problems?

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The Strategy that Improves Recruiting Results and Satisfaction

Recruiters have good business partnerships with hiring managers = recruiters can function as trusted and strategic advisors

Recruiters who are able to function as trusted and strategic advisors are able to achieve better recruiting results



The Insufficient Solutions

So after telling recruiters to be more consultative and build relationships, what's left to do when there isn't any significant improvement?

Sometimes we see companies add more candidate sourcing avenues, such as adding additional job boards and resume database access for recruiters, as well as things like buying recruiter access to the LinkedIn recruiter service.

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It's important for recruiters to understand how to leverage all the new ways to generate candidates. But the larger solution isn't training on finding candidates nor trying to bring more candidates forward to the hiring manager. If finding and assessing great candidates were sufficient, the frustrations and problems would have been eliminated long ago.

If I were to make a guess, I would say it's likely your recruiters are actually bringing good candidates forward for many of their requisitions—all things considered. But if bringing in good candidates were sufficient to make recruiting effective, the issues we discussed earlier wouldn't exist.

Sometimes there is a lot of effort put into defining and building a big recruiting process map. Then the hiring managers are "invited" to a meeting to learn the recruiting process. Despite the incredible investment of time this involves, and the good intentions of all involved, the expectations and commitments usually made in those meetings are rarely met. Again, if a meeting were sufficient to improve recruiting, it would have happened by now.

Some companies implement a score card process. While there is great value in a score card, we've found two issues with the traditional approach to improving recruiting.

- The wrong things are measured, and do not result in improving relationships.
- There is really no significant improvement in recruiting results.

These things may get marginal improvement. The good news is there is an easy and fast way to equip recruiters with the tools and techniques that will transform them into strategic advisors.

Finally! The Training That Can Dramatically Improve Your Recruiting Results

Ironically, most recruiting training available today focuses on new ways to find candidates. So it's understandable that most recruiting functions are left to simply wishful thinking that people will figure out how to develop the skill that can make a huge difference in recruiting success.

Until now it has been nearly impossible to find any training to help the recruiting function be more consultative and build strong business partnerships. Now that training is available. It's the simple solution to a serious problem. It's the unique structured formula that gives recruiters the tools and techniques to move into the strategic business partner and advisor role.

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Just a portion of what this training addresses:

- How to develop the all-important mental “set up” to the creation of a strategic advisor role
- Actual scripts that recruiters can use to address key areas with hiring managers
- The simple language changes that invisibly move the hiring manager into the relationship with the recruiter (it only takes one to make massive changes in any relationship)
- Why the “push-back” is not only unnecessary but dangerous to a relationship. And what to do that is actually more effective.
- How to deliver bad news and strength the relationship at the same time.
- How to get hiring managers to willingly sit still long enough to get the critical information before starting to fill a new requisition
- The one question the hiring manager will love to answer. Asking this will instantly boost the relationship.

Tools included that it’s taken years to compile:

- How to identify the reasons “time to fill” is unacceptably long—without saying a thing!
- An exhaustive list of questions to ask the hiring manager to successfully launch a new search and build an even stronger business partnership in the process.
- A satisfaction survey that actually pinpoints the areas to focus on improving the relationship—and the danger of using this survey right away.
- A simple one-page worksheet that will get the recruiter and hiring manager working together to fix a problem in any search.

While the impact of poor recruiter-hiring manager relationships is often obscured, it is real and significant. Now with simple techniques, worksheets and tips, those relationships can be transformed and recruiting results noticeably improved.

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What Previous Attendees Are Saying

A month after attending the workshop, recruiters are using and benefiting from what they learned. Here is what a few had to say:

“Typically I wouldn’t have had the courage to {have a conversation} with this VP. It felt empowering to be able to have that conversation and I didn’t leave the meeting thinking there was something I wasn’t doing. I used to beat myself up because I couldn’t have those discussions, but not now! These are small changes you can implement right away and see big impact right away.”

Denise

“It was good to hear about how the words you choose can change relationships, and how to pick words so people don’t take offense but can hear what you are saying. This is the first time I ever heard anything like this.” **Andrea**

This workshop gets you back on track...I went into it doubting I would learn anything because I’ve been recruiting for a long time. This was refreshing and interesting. Well presented. Very interactive. Good solid examples and topics. I am very impressed.” **Marilyn**

I wasn’t sure what I would get out of this when the workshop started, but it was definitely worth it. I had never had such a clear explanation of the simple word choices that can make a difference in being seen as credible. My biggest aha was in the discussion around “word choices may not be clear.” **Thalia**

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