

HOW TO.....

How to Qualify a Recruiter

By A. Charlotte

If you are a Human Resources Professional or a Direct Hiring Manager chances are very good that you get at least one call from a recruiter every day telling you why they are the best resource for you to work with. At some point it all becomes noise and you may find yourself asking “Why should I take these calls?” or thinking “I wish these people would stop calling me!” The nagging question is “What if due to your frustration you ignore the call from the one recruiter, that needle in the haystack, who may actually be able to help you?”

Limited Time - The Quick Qualifiers

First things first you want to know if this is a contingency recruiter with a candidate you might be interested in, or a recruiter who may not have a candidate to market to you but who specializes in your industry. If they leave a voice mail or other message referencing a top professional in your industry then you know they are marketing a candidate and you can choose to return the call because the person they have may be someone of value to you and your business. If this is the case if and you choose to call them back:

Consider Asking:

- What are the top three reasons I should consider interviewing this person?
- Do you specialize in my industry?
- What are your terms and conditions? Send me your agreement for review.
- **Good recruiters** should be able to handle these question in five minutes. **They should be prepared and enthusiastic.**

Keep in Mind:

- An ethical recruiter will not send you a candidates resume without qualifying your genuine interest and getting an agreement in place. **It is up to you to decide if this is worth your time.**

If a recruiter calls and they are marketing their capabilities and specialization in your industry

Consider Asking

- What do you think the biggest challenge a person in my position in this industry faces today?
- Can you share examples of people you have placed in my industry such as specific titles and roles?
- What are your terms and conditions? Are they flexible? can you send me your agreement for review?
- Do you have a website or brochure outlining what you do?
- **Again good recruiters** should be prepared to handle these questions in five minutes or less.

The above is what we call the five minute qualifier, often it can be much less because the recruiter either does not have an interesting candidate or cannot answer simple questions about your industry.

In Depth Qualifying

Depending on your company structure, large, small, publicly traded, or privately held you may or may not have a formal process for qualifying potential recruiting partners.

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Do you:

- Prefer to work with multiple contingent recruiters?
- Prefer to work with a one or two contingent recruiters on an “exclusive” basis?
- Prefer to work with an engaged/retained recruiter for all your positions or for specific positions?
- Understand how recruiters qualify candidates? Have a process you want them to follow?
- Is industry specialization critical to you?
- How important is the industry network of the recruiter to you?
- Is specific knowledge of disciplines important to you. e.g. finance or engineering for example?
- Have a budget for recruiting?
- Is it worth creating a vendor qualifying system for recruiters?
- Allow recruiters to have direct access to Hiring Executives/ Managers?
- Use an applicant tracking system and expect recruiters to submit candidates through that system?
- Expect recruiters to do reference checks? Re-verify references?
- Expect formalized communication regarding recruitments efforts e.g. weekly update emails or phone calls?
- Provide Job Descriptions and Salary Information to your recruiters?
- Expect your recruiters to interview the hiring team and produce a needs analysis for you and marketing package for potential candidates?
- Can the recruiter provide relevant references for you to review.

This is just a short list of questions that should be answered before you go about qualifying a recruiter to work with. It may be that depending on the position and level criteria or the search the answers could be yes to several of the questions. The key thing to take away from this is that you are looking for flexibility and so is your search consultant. It may be that the best option for your company is two or three options depending on level, urgency to fill the position and industry knowledge and depth.

Proposed Solutions

Now that you have thought about what you want in a recruiter you can actually qualify them to your specific requirements and ensure that you get the best possible recruiter to meet your needs. Depending on size of the organization you might go with a single solution or a tiered solution. Lets look at two possible solutions.

Small company - Hires two to four professionals per year. The hires are most likely going to be individual contributor hires engaged in engineering and design. The company has a budget for recruiters however the budget requirements are for exactly the number of hires forecasted.

- **Solution One** - Find one or more contingency recruiters who specialize in your industry and disciplines. You pay the fee if they fill the position so your financial risk is low, however since you have made no commitment to either exclusivity or number of recruiters working a position your results may not be excellent.
- **Solution Two** - Choose to find and qualify a retained/engaged recruiter who works to a performance clause. You pay a portion of the fee up front but if the recruiter does not perform they have to refund the fee. Typically recruiters do not like to refund fees so they are very motivated to fill your positions. This way the risk to you is still minimal but you can be assured that the recruiter is motivated to fill your position.

Large Company - May or may not be publicly traded. Typically hires between 20 and as high as a 1000 people per

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year through recruiters. Has a budget for recruiters with some flexibility depending on number of hires and market conditions. Positions may range from the executive management level down to individual contributors and encompass many disciplines. In this case a tiered solution makes sense.

- **Tier One (Individual Contributor)** - Find one or more contingency recruiters who specialize in your industry and disciplines. You pay the fee if they fill the position so your financial risk is low, however since you have made no commitment to either exclusivity or number of recruiters working a position your results may not be excellent. If you prefer to work with a minimal number of recruiters you can start by opening the searches to few firms and then narrowing it down to one or two. This will increase a recruiters desire to work with you as they know their opportunity to earn a fee is higher.
- **Tier Two (Mid Level Management)** - Choose to find and qualify a retained/engaged recruiter who works to a performance clause. You pay a portion of the fee up front but if the recruiter does not perform they have to refund the fee. Typically recruiters do not like to refund fees so they are very motivated to fill your positions. This way the risk to you is still minimal but you can be assured that the recruiter is motivated to fill your position.
- **Tier Three (Senior Executives)** - Typically even the largest companies may only fill one or two of these positions every year. In that case working with a highly qualified engaged or retained recruiter makes sense. Even at this level many smaller boutique forms will negotiate a performance clause based agreement with you.

In Summary

Before you qualify your recruiters

- Know what you want them to work on.
- How you want them to work.
- How you motivate them to meet and exceed your expectations.
- Be realistic about what you are paying for and what you can expect for the fee arrangements you make with them and the access you grant them.

“Qualify Them”

- Have your list of qualifiers for all tiers of search and either send it to them or discuss it with them.
- Make sure they meet your minimum requirements
- Ensure they understand that you are professional and you understand they are too.
- The purpose of qualifying is to ensure two professionals are not wasting each others time.
- A recruiter’s time should be just as valuable to them as your time is to you.

A wise person once told me “ You only get out of the hire what you willing to put into it”. Talent acquisition is the engine of a company. We need to treat it as such. The first step to do doing that is to qualify every recruiter you work with.

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