Dialogue

FALL 2007

ASSOCIATION OF CANADIAN SEARCH EMPLOYMENT & STAFFING SERVICES

IN THIS ISSUE

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Message from the President

By Chris Roach, CPC

AS AN ASSOCIATION representing over 80% of the staffing industry in Canada, we serve as Canada's national advocate for professional ethics and standards in the search, employment and staffing services industry. Association members commit to a Code of Standards that promotes ethical treatment of employees and clients, and adherence to all applicable Employment and Human Rights laws.

ACSESS must always recognize the diverse needs, interests and expectations of our membership. The fact that we now serve several sub-sectors of an increasingly complex industry presents its share of challenges, as well as offering many successes. I am delighted to report that earlier this year, a special ad hoc committee made up of ACSESS Board members and senior executives of member staffing firms was formed to reaffirm our mission, vision and key deliverables for the next three years.

One of the drivers of this ad hoc committee has been feedback from our special interest groups and Chapters. The special interest groups established in 2005 are designed to offer a forum for owners and managers of like-minded staffing firms to discuss opportunities and concerns. The Chapters are the grass roots of our Association. This is a pivotal area of service, and for many members, their local chapter is seen to be the principle reason for joining. All Directors, at both the Chapter and National levels, volunteer their time and knowledge to this industry and association. A well-engaged membership and good communication is paramount in achieving our goals. While clearly recognizing the hectic schedules we all must manage each day, ACSESS is always looking for individuals to become actively involved with committees, Chapter activities and special interest group discussions.

In the area of government relations, there are many political and legal discussions occurring across the country that have a direct impact on our industry. Our Association is recognized and respected at all levels of government as a key stakeholder in labour, employment and recruitment issues.

We have maintained and will continue to foster an active, responsive and successful government relations program that will protect our interests from those groups who propagate poorly conceived and ill advised public policy views.

Information regarding our current and past involvement in government relations is always available in the Members section of our website.

The success of the ACSESS Ontario Health & Safety Group has been outstanding. As the employer of record, our membership must manage the health and safety of thousands of workers at hundreds of different work sites. This unique employer responsibility and the challenges we face were recognized during a recent ACSESS meeting with Ontario WSIB Chair, Steve Mahoney.

In an effort to expand the success of our Health and Safety Program across Canada, in July of this year ACSESS confirmed industry commitment and concluded a memorandum of understanding with Alberta Employment, Im-

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PLEASE CIRCULATE

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PRESIDENT continued from page 1
migration, and Industry to form a partnership in health and safety.

Our CPC modules have been very well received by all those who have participated. The program enhances the competency and knowledge of labour, employment law, ethics and good business practices of participants. Not only does it further demonstrate our professional commitment to this industry it is also extremely important that staffing practitioners understand the federal and provincial laws that govern our industry. We must never lose sight of the professional and ethical responsibility we have in managing and advising the careers and livelihoods of so many.

The number of ACSESS members entitled to use the CPC designation in Canada is approximately 250, and the total complement who have qualified since the program was introduced by APPAC is more than 450.

We are making it a priority to complete the curriculum for all active member provinces across Canada as quickly as possible.

Another priority is to significantly increase recognition of ACSESS and the impact we make as an advocate for the staffing industry. At the beginning of the year, NPR (NATIONAL Public Relations) was retained as the official ACSESS PR company. We already enjoy a strong and results-oriented relationship with NPR in Quebec, and we are confident this relationship with NPR, coupled with the mandate to hire a full-time PR professional to assist the management team, will be truly effective in representing our industry across Canada. To be truly effective, we must have the resources in place to develop and deliver these services. Therefore, we are currently exploring ideas to create new revenue opportunities for the Association.

On October 24–25, 2007, ACSESS will be offering a Fall Symposium in Edmonton with content designed to draw Members from various regions. Two modules of the CPC course will be offered at that time, with a variety of other topics such as "Seven Secrets for Building your Recruitment Strategies," work place safety, industry licensing and ethical business practices. On May 6–8, 2008, in Toronto, Ontario, a 10th Anniversary Conference will offer a bold and exciting program designed to bring an unprecedented number of participants together.

Significant labour shortages of both skilled and un-skilled workers continues to escalate in a growing number of regions and industries across Canada. As more and more baby boomers move into retirement, our country's emerging skills shortage will continue to grow in the coming years.

This has, and will continue to have, and create exciting and challenging times for our industry as we play a major role in the competitive war for global talent within Canadian organizations. I believe that you, as staffing professionals, the companies you work for, and our Association, ACSESS, will continue to play an integral part in the Canadian economy by providing opportunities and solutions to both job seekers and employers.❏

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Does Your Sales Staff Make Sales Happen?

By Bob Cohen and Sam Sacco

NEW CUSTOMERS and new sales volume are needed by all staffing firms for growth. Unfortunately, there are few customers that last a lifetime.

Hopefully your staff is adding customers much faster than they lose accounts; however, since losing some accounts annually is inevitable, to continue organic growth you must always be planning the addition of new customers.

Of course sound planning is only the beginning; executing that plan is where the rubber meets the road. Does your staff understand how to make it happen?

We are a leading mergers and acquisitions advisory service exclusive to the staffing industry. In our experience, every firm may need to sell their business at some point in the future and as our industry preaches that every employee on a career path needs to know a good recruiter or two, we believe every staffing industry owner needs to know a good M & A advisor or two, so if needed, they have a head start.

Our particular interest in this subject is related to a question buyers of staffing firms often ask about sellers: How do they develop new business? Are they good at it? Do they have a sustainable, transferable and scalable process or is it just hit and miss?

The following suggestions raise some points worthy of your consideration. We begin with a question:

Do you employ order takers or order makers? The answer may depend on whether your sales staff is more reactive or proactive in their sales approach with your potential customers.

Eight Simple Guidelines to Help Someone Become More Proactive and Less Reactive

1. Proactive salespeople create opportunities; reactive salespeople wait for customers to offer an opportunity.

2. Proactive salespeople anticipate and act in advance; reactive salespeople wait and see.

3. Proactive salespeople are selective in the business they pursue; reactive salespeople must take whatever business comes their way.

4. Proactive salespeople run their territories; reactive salespeople let their territories run them.

5. Proactive salespeople take new ideas to customers; reactive salespeople wait for customers to ask for new ideas.

6. Proactive salespeople preempt price objections with value added; reactive salespeople wait for price to become an issue and then don't know how to resolve the problem.

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7. Proactive salespeople study on their own; reactive salespeople wait for their companies to provide training.

8. Proactive salespeople invest in the tools of their trade that will help them succeed; reactive salespeople wait for their companies to supply these tools for them.

If you want to become an order maker, you must become more proactive in your sales approach. Being proactive means doing all those things that will make you successful without your boss telling you to do them.

Last Look — Be Careful What You Wish For?

Lo' the number of times over the years we've heard from salespeople who are bidding on a substantial piece of new or additional business that, "I'm hoping to get last look." This term means the buyer will show you everyone else's prices and give you the opportunity to lower your price. What a deal!

Is this really the best you can hope to achieve with a customer? If so, it's not much. Think through this "privilege that you wish for."

The underlying premise of this approach is that you have more to give. The buyer who says, "I'll give you last look" is really saying: "You and I both know that you have something left to give up, but we'll play a game and I'll use the competition's price to drive down your price."

> *"Why do I need last look when I gave you my best deal to begin with?"*

The salesperson that asks the buyer for the "privilege" of last look is really saying, "I haven't given you the best price I can, and I'm holding out until the last minute, so let's dance for a while longer."

The buyer who shows you others' prices is unethical and not to be trusted. It's a sure bet that this same buyer is showing your price to your competitors. Is this the foundation on which you want to build your business? Probably not.

Buyers will continue to play these games as long as salespeople participate. The next time the buyer promises you last look say, "Why do I need last look when I gave you my best deal to begin with?" Then, you will help stop the madness.

A better question to ask yourself is, "Do I really want that business at that price?"

Recruiting is tough and getting tougher – why give away hard-to-locate and costly resources at discount prices?

Will you be able to find other assignments with other customers' willing to pay a fair price for precious top talent? If not, why not?

Do movie theatres lower their prices on Saturday nights because they expect a packed house?

We know most customers, especially those who spend significant annual resources on staffing services always want more for less money so they can be competitive and, boy, don't we trip over each other trying to accommodate them.

Can our industry sell on the basis of value, rather than price, or is the customer unable to measure performance so they use price as their guidepost?

Perhaps the market in the future will belong to those savvy operators who can help their customers' measure the performance received by their staffing service, rather than continue down the self-destructive road of continually lowering prices.

There is ultimately a limit to the efficiencies that can be achieved in lowering processing costs but there is no limit to the value our industry can add for its clients if we can find a way to measure the value we can deliver and compete on that basis.

The rules above can be a useful guideline and hopefully with the right corporate culture, your staff can be nurtured to lead rather than follow, to be proactive and not just wait for the rising economic tide to lift your ship as it lifts others'. As we know tides will also ebb at times.❏

For more information, contact Bob Cohen at 416-229-6462 or Sam Sacco at 910-509-0691. We can also be reached at bob@racohenconsulting.com or sam@racohenconsulting.com. Sam and Bob have successfully completed over 100 staffing industry transactions. There are many more articles on our website at www.racohenconsulting.com.

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The IT Staffing Agency Value Proposition

By Kevin Dee, CEO,
Eagle Professional Resources Inc.

AS A "MIDDLEMAN" the staffing industry was written off, because the internet was going to replace us…well the staffing industry is alive and well. I have also heard the comment from clients… "you have made your money now, so you should drop your margin!" I have heard the same from contractors. I hear from some people that agencies bring "no value." All interesting perspectives so I thought I'd address the value proposition that an IT (since that is my specialty) staffing agency brings.

Seven Key Points

1. IT staffing agencies offer clients a "just in time" staffing solution, with direct access to more qualified IT people than any large employer!

2. The agencies can offer these resources at very aggressive prices.

3. The agencies find these resources when you need them!

4. When clients use an agency to bring in contract resources there are many benefits that come with that solution:

- Flexibility, to scale up and down and supplement employees to meet demand;
- Resources that generally hit the ground running;
- Resources that are *only* there while there is work to be done;
- Resources that demand *no* HR time… no issue management, no training, no career management, no benefits package;
- Resources that are *only* paid while working…no vacation pay, no maternity leave pay, no sick pay;
- Resources that can be let go without fuss…no severance, no legal issues, etc.

5. The agencies bring their clients protection from the very real risks associated with employer/employee relationships.

6. The agencies typically bear the brunt of collection issues. We pay the contractors quickly and deal with the vagaries of invoicing large clients that have increasingly longer payment terms.

7. Agencies provide contractual protection from intellectual property (IP) issues, non-competes, non-solicitations, etc.

The way the industry works is that the client pays a "bill rate" that includes an amount for the contractor ("pay rate") and an amount for the agency. Agencies express their component as either margin (a percentage of the "bill rate") or markup (a percentage of the "pay rate").

So, why can't an agency just drop its

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"The staffing industry provides a tremendous value to the economy: (a) by providing employment for many thousands of temporary and contract workers; and (b) by providing companies with on demand access to a huge pool of qualified resources."

margin after a certain amount of time?

There are a few reasons:

1. Agencies only get paid for the very small percentage of contractors that are actually on contract. Typically this will be less than 1% of their total database.

2. The cost of running an agency is not just about managing the current contractors that happen to be on contract. The agency incurs ongoing costs associated with maintaining that large database of screened professionals.

3. Every company needs to maintain at least a minimum level of profitability in order to remain in business. If you were to look at the EBITDA associated with the publicly traded staffing companies you would see they average in the 3 to 5% range. This is not a highly profitable industry.

4. Clients tend to look at the revenue line and assume there is lots of profit in there to cut. Typical agency margins can range from 15 to 25% of the bill rate to the client, the other 75 to 85% going directly to the contractor. Out of the remaining margin an agency needs to pay for all of its company costs…the largest being pay for the staff (management, sales, recruiters, proposal writers, admin, finance, technology, marketing, etc.).

In addition there is the cost of the infrastructure (offices, technology, communications, furniture, etc.). Then there are the general operating costs (training, financing, insurance, legal, travel, entertainment, job boards, charities, sponsorships, memberships, etc.).

There are other costs that agencies incur through involvement with industry associations, through which we protect the industry and our clients from legislative issues and political issues. Agencies also incur costs through the many and sundry issues that arise in the day to day business of dealing with people.

The staffing industry provides a tremendous value to the economy: (a) by providing employment for many thousands of temporary and contract workers; and (b) by providing companies with on demand access to a huge pool of qualified resources.

That is a powerful Value Proposition! We earn our margins!❑

Kevin Dee, CEO, Eagle Professional Resources Inc., is also a past President of ACSESS and currently sits on the National Board of Directors.

Government Relations Report

By Mary McIninch, B.A, LL.B (Membre du Barreau du Québec), Manager of Government Relations

October 2007

A primary objective of ACSESS is to actively represent the industry and our membership before governments by providing input on employment legislation and regulations at the national and provincial levels. At the same time, ACSESS assumes a leadership role in ensuring that industry members are aware of legislation and regulatory changes which may (drastically) affect their businesses and responsibilities as employers.

Summary of Ongoing Industry Representations:

Manitoba – Licensing Consultations – Review of Employment Services Act Later this fall, ACSESS will be meeting with the Manitoba Ministry of Labour and Immigration to discuss proposed changes to industry licensing requirements under the *Employment Services Act*. The intention of government is to strengthen enforcement mechanisms and penalties for non compliance under the Act. In August, our Manitoba committee met with Dave Dyson, Manitoba Director of Employment Standards, to discuss the recent changes to the *Employment Standards Code* and our recommendations to Manitoba members re: termination provisions and the exemption for Elect to Work employees.

We look forward to maintaining open dialogue with Ministry officials and continuing to represent members interests in the province.

Alberta – Review of Employment Agency Business Licensing Regulation. ACSESS continues to correspond with Service Alberta on the subject of industry standards and licensing. The Director of Fair Trading has announced that the government will be reviewing the Employment Agency Business Licensing Regulation later this fall and has invited ACSESS to provide input on proposed changes to enforcement mechanisms under the Act. Consultations will be held in November, 2007.

Ontario – Meeting with Chair Mahoney. On September 17, ACSESS met with WSIB Chair Steve Mahoney to present our association, industry involvement in the Safety Groups program and update on ongoing industry files and representations. Since our meeting, ACSESS has maintained open communication with the senior management team and has been officially recognized as a Health and Safety Partner on the WSIB website.

Ontario – WSIB Accreditation for Ontario Workplaces. ACSESS continues to meet with WSIB representatives to provide feedback on the Consultation Paper on the proposed Accreditation program for Ontario Workplaces. We advised that ACSESS supports the general principles put forward in the Consultation Paper, and is interested in providing a member to serve on the "Multi-Stakeholder Committee." The target for introduction of at least a pilot accreditation program is early 2008.

Ontario – WSIB Independent Con-

ACSESS Welcomes the Following New Members

WE LOOK FORWARD to meeting many of you at association events.

1up EMPLOYMENT ADVANTAGE, Toronto
ADVANTAGE PREVENTION CLAIMS MANAGEMENT, Mississauga
ANTIAN PROFESSIONAL SERVICES INC., Ottawa
MERCER BRADLEY INC., Vancouver
NEW MEDIA LINKS INC., Toronto
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tractor Status. Over the course of 2006/07, ACSESS and the National Association of Computer Consulting Businesses (NACCB) have held a series of meetings with WSIB Revenue and Policy division to discuss issues related to status determination. ACSESS and NACCB have reviewed the guidelines, prepared a joint response and will be meeting with Policy and Revenue again later this fall.

Quebec. ACSESS continues to work closely with government agencies in Quebec to promote and educate officials in the province and will be launching a provincial communications campaign this fall. Successful meetings have been held with the Minister of Employment, Sam Hamad, and David Whissell, Minister of Labour, to update government on Bernier representations.

The Ministry recognizes the importance of ACSESS in educating and ensuring the correct messages are communicated. A communication campaign will be launched to educate and promote the importance of the staffing services industry in Quebec.❑

ACSESS Recognizes Level 1 Certificate Recipients

THE FOLLOWING 11 members have successfully completed the Level 1 test since the last issue of the Dialogue.

LYSSA BALLESTEROS, Unique Personnel Services
KIM CLARKE, The People Bank
BRADLEY CUZEN, McNeill Nakamoto Recruitment Group
JANICE DUFFY, Advantage Personnel Ltd.
ELISA EISENBEISER, LucasWorks!
TAMARA FONTANA, RSM Richter Consulting Inc.
DANNY GOLDSMITH, The People Bank
BRENDA HAESLER, LucasWorks!
MICHELLE LAUB, The People Bank
JEFF SIMPSON, Harcourt Recruiting Specialists
EVA SKUZA, Trans-Logic

YOU LIKE ME — YOU REALLY LIKE ME!

6 Ways to Increase Your Referrals, and Make More Sales

By Colleen Francis

ONE QUESTION I get all the time is “Colleen – how can I get more referrals?”

This is the most common question I get when conducting prospecting workshops. My most common answer is: “What have you done to deserve more referrals?”

Referrals are the most powerful tool in any sales person’s arsenal. A referred prospect is much more likely to be ready to listen to you, trust what you say and – ultimately – to buy from you. Referrals make your job easier, and help you sell more with less effort and in less time. What else could any sales person ask for?

If you want to increase your referral rate, however, you have to start not by looking to your existing customers, but by asking yourself a number of questions about how you conduct business on a daily basis. The most important question is: “how likeable are you?”

People buy *you* first, not your company or products. So to get more referrals, you have to make like Sally Field, and make sure your customers really, really like and trust you.

What are you doing every day to be more likeable? Like everything else in sales, there is no magic “likeability” bullet that works every time, with every customer. However, the following are six of the best ways I’ve found to help you increase your referrals, by putting the other person first – and simply having fun!

1. Start a Monthly Advocate Program

Once a year, do a customer genealogy to see who or what was responsible for all the additions to your customer base. Odds are, you’ll find between 5–20 primary referral sources, ranging from current clients to friends, partners and suppliers.

Make an “advocate list” of these active referral sources, and develop a concrete plan to keep in touch with them on a regular basis. Every 4–6 weeks, for example, send them something of value – not a brochure or promotional piece, but something they will actually value and use, like an article or book you think they will enjoy, a phone call, an invitation to lunch or breakfast, or even a referral for their business from you.

I can’t stress this enough, though – whatever you send has to be of value to them, not simply an advertisement for you. After all, the goal is for you to help them improve their business, not your own. Think about it this way – what could you give them that will help grow their revenue? In helping to grow their business, trust me, it won’t take long before they return the favor and help grow yours. For examples of what to send to your best referral sources, please feel free to download a complimentary copy of our Advocate Worksheet.

2. Develop a Culture of Referrals

Another approach that can help you develop a steady stream of referrals is to ask questions that benefit your customer first. One Engage customer doubled her referrals simply by asking the following client-focused question at the end of every client meeting:

“Now…how can I help you?”

By putting the needs of her customers first, she demonstrates that she truly cares about them. When people sense that you care, they tend to want to return the favor. In fact, you may find that many of your customers are genuinely surprised by a question like this, because no one has ever asked them that before. And that’s why your follow-up question is equally indispensable:

“You’ve helped my business grow by becoming part of our family network. I’d like to help your business grow, too. So let me ask you – what type of people do you want to meet to help increase your revenue?”

3. Write Some Letters

If you don’t feel comfortable asking for referrals face-to-face, try the approach that’s worked for sales people, direct marketers – and hopeless romantics – for centuries: write a letter!

Regardless of the business you’re in, an effective letter writing campaign can bring in a steady stream of new leads that will have an immediate and dramatic impact on your bottom line. When drafting your letter, the key is to make sure it says four things:

Thank them for their business.

Remind them how you met – especially if it was through a referral.

Ask them to send you some names.

Tell them that you will reward them with lunch or a gift basket if their referral turns into business.

Sound simple? That’s because it is! And the real beauty is – it works! Since implementing this system at Engage last month, we’ve seen a steady stream of new referrals arriving from our customers and advocates, on an almost daily basis.

4. Send Thank-you Notes and Gifts

Send a thank-you note for every referral, and a gift for every referral that turns into business.

> *“If your client has a volunteer day where they help out a local project in the community, see if you can participate with them.”*

Thank-you notes should be handwritten, on a note card or postcard that isn’t branded with your company advertising. Keep a supply of traditional, fun, theme and plain note cards handy for all occasions throughout the year. For a real treat, spoil yourself with a great fountain pen to make writing the notes something you really look forward to.

For gifts, don’t send the same old thing to everyone. Instead, take a minute to think about what your customer would really like. If they’re dedicated oenophiles, send wine. If they’re into sports, try tickets to a game. For gourmets or candy-o-holics (like myself), food baskets work wonders, and are available in almost any size, style and budget at the click of a mouse – some of my personal favorites are www.harryanddavid.com, www.elenis.com and www.candybouquet.com.

Got some favorite sites of your own? I’m always on the lookout for new ideas (not to mention new sources of gourmet delectables!). So if you send us a list of your favorite Web sites for client gifts, we’ll return the favor by sending you a gift, too – a free copy of our new special report, *Honesty Sells*, in e-book format. There – see how easy that was?

One last thing – I implore you *never* to send electronic greeting cards, no matter the occasion. E-card-s look like you were too lazy or didn’t care enough to do the real leg work needed to honor your customer – and let’s face it, that’s not too far off the mark, is it?

Go the extra mile, and write a personalized note. That little extra effort is what will get you noticed – and get you more referrals.

5. Bring Like-minded People Together

Create a top-of-the-class networking club. Make a list of those people in your city who you know to be well-connected, great networkers, then invite them all to come together with one catch – they have to bring someone that they think the rest of the group should meet. It’s likely this person will be a great networker, too.

When great networkers get together in the same room, the energy is unmistakable, and they share leads like there’s no tomorrow. Plus, because everyone

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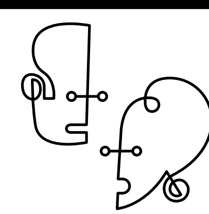

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in the room will be of the same caliber, there'll be an even higher propensity to share, because everyone will feel like the giving and receiving is balanced.

6. Have Fun with Holidays and Celebrations

Most sales people send Christmas cards. But if you want to stand out and be remembered by your customers, why not try something a little different? In addition to sending cards out each December 25, mix a few of the following ideas into your annual calendar:

- Valentine's Day candy baskets.
- Birthday cakes on their birthday.
- Champagne on their company's anniversary.
- Thank-you cards or gifts on their anniversary of doing business with you.
- Gifts for their children's birthdays.
- Plants on the first day of spring, or at Easter.
- Orange and black candy at Halloween.
- Gifts for your clients' admin assistants on Secretaries' Day.
- Patriotic presents on national holidays (e.g., July 1 or 4).
- Thanksgiving cards or food baskets.

"There are countless ways you can let your customers know you care and are thinking about them."

If your client has a volunteer day when they help out a local project in the community, see if you can participate with them.

Send congratulations to your clients when you know they've completed something significant in their personal or professional lives – like they just ran their first 10K, earned a black belt in Karate or qualified for the Boston Marathon.

Yes, some of these ideas require you to know detailed information about your customers. But isn't that what sales is all about?

At its most basic level, selling is relationship building. And to build a successful relationship, you have to know a few things about the other person who's in the relationship with you. Think about it this way: if you don't know this information about your customers, who does?

There are countless ways you can let your customers know you care and are thinking about them. Each has its pros and cons. Some work consistently but cost too much. Others are cheap and easy to implement, but don't produce as many leads as you might want.

Try them all, and try them often, and I guarantee, you'll start to see results – and more referrals – in no time.❑

Colleen Francis, Sales Expert, is Founder and President of Engage Selling Solutions (www.EngageSelling.com). Armed with skills developed from years of experience, Colleen helps clients realize immediate results, achieve lasting success and permanently raise their bottom line. Start improving your results today with Engage's online Newsletter Engaging Ideas AND 10 weeks of free sales tips: www.EngagingIdeasOnline.com. *© 2007 Engage Selling Solutions.*

Strategic Interviewing Tips

The ACSESS September Webinar presented by Barbara Bruno, CPC, CTS, of Good As Gold Training Received great reviews.

With evaluation forms consistently showing top rating for this session, ACSESS extends appreciation to Barbara Bruno for her contribution to our programming.

The following tips were presented.

Five things to accomplish during an interview:

1. Knowledge about a person's life
2. Hot buttons
3. Skills/technology/expertise
4. Establish candidate rapport
5. Determine how to best package this candidate

The most important questions you can ask in an interview to assist in your close:

1. Five major accomplishments and the impact on their employer
2. Five things you'd change if you were your boss (real reason for talking to you)
3. The most important issues for them to make a change
4. And what was there for them to make past changes
5. Strengths
6. Weaknesses
7. Reasons to hire you over someone else
8. Words that describe you
9. Interview availability
10. Timeframe and notice
11. Where they have interviewed, offers they've received and rejected

Recruitment Process Outsourcing (RPO) Factor or Fad?

By Bob Cohen and Sam Sacco

ACCORDING to Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia, recruitment process outsourcing (RPO) is a form of business process outsourcing (BPO) when an employer outsources or transfers all or part of the recruiting process to an external service provider.

A true or total RPO solution involves the outsourcing of the entire recruiting function or process to an external service provider. This provider serves to provide the necessary skills, tools, technologies, and activities to serve as their client's virtual "recruiting department" in some cases and in others the customer is engaging the RPO service provider to handle specific parts of the hiring cycle.

Therefore, true RPO involves a comprehensive transfer (outsourcing) of all recruiting activities and processes to a third party provider.

RPO can be utilized to address all ongoing recruiting needs or it can be event or project driven such as to gear up to open a new facility or to open a new division to launch a new product line.

RPO engagements are often tailored to provide a group of selected services offered by the provider to match each customer's specific needs. The list of services is like a menu, creating a cafeteria approach to meet the outcomes desired by the customer for that assignment.

However, RPO is not executive search nor is it staffing, and market place confusion has caused some colossal failures in the formative years of RPO. It seems that both corporate customers and the sellers of these services underestimated the complexity of achieving successful RPO execution.

RPO is Comprehensive

RPO may involve: recruitment planning, sourcing; screening; testing; interviewing; background checks and drug testing; hiring; coordinating the offer letter; on-boarding; maintaining applicant tracking logs, requisition, and candidate files; reporting; and training. Full-service (true) RPO runs the gamut – from finding the candidate to hiring a new employee and almost everything in between.

This definition differs from occasional recruiting support often provided by many temporary/contingency staffing firms and executive search firms and often also differs from contract project recruiters. While these organizations do provide an invaluable service, they do not qualify as an RPO as it does not involve the outsourcing of the recruiting process.

An RPO solution may involve outsourcing certain steps in the recruitment process that can be more efficiently handled by an outside, specialist provider. Many search and staffing firms have always performed a portion of the services offered by a true RPO provider and this has added to some of the marketplace confusion.

Part of the challenge of understanding RPO is that it is often defined in various ways by its providers. Until RPO practioners clearly define what it is and what it isn't, the above definition is a good starting point.

True RPO services can vary from assignment to assignment with each RPO contract having its own nuances. An RPO provider that does a great job on an IT assignment may not be able to handle call center hiring or hiring a large sales team.

There are organizations that offer

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some of the services offered by true RPO providers, such as:

A. Large consulting firms may have an area of their human resource outsourcing business that handles some RPO functions;

B. Staffing/search and contract project recruiter firms that provide recruiting functions sometimes with add-on services;

C. Firms that process any number of the administrative tasks, such as: sourcing; screening; testing; interviewing; background checks and drug testing; hiring; coordinating the offer letter; onboarding; maintaining applicant tracking logs, requisition, and candidate files; reporting; orientation and training.

D. Some more sophisticated firms offer recruitment planning, needs assessment and training in these areas;

E. True RPO providers that combine recruitment talent and expertise with business processing expertise to take ownership of the recruitment function for their customer.

RPO Is an Attractive Model

Many mature staffing and search firms have been attracted to the RPO model as a way to protect their strong customer base and to provide those customers with higher margin services.

The key driver for employers to seek out an RPO is to maximize their resources to attract every business's most important asset – top quality people. Every organization needs great talent to grow.

> *"The key driver for employers to seek out an RPO is to maximize their resources…"*

There are four major reasons organizational employers outsource these functions. They are:

1. To address skill and expertise shortfalls;
2. To shed non-strategic, non-core functions;
3. To reduce management costs; and
4. To avoid large capital investments in non-core areas.

RPO is a more specific and narrow arena than human resources outsourcing (HRO), managed services or BPO. However, RPO is not merely discounted or unbundled direct hire services. Attention to the recruitment process is a key differentiator.

Generally, but not in all cases, with an RPO solution, the provider takes ownership of the process and is responsible for the results.

RPO has attracted corporate customers when those organizations realize they cannot recruit effectively so they bring in the (RPO) experts to address their recruitment needs.

However, one of the major challenges for RPO providers is that they have unwittingly allowed their customers to outsource "a broken recruitment process" to them that often has resulted in great frustration on both sides.

Much of the early RPO efforts involved the employer firm outsourcing its internal corporate dysfunction to the RPO provider and being disappointed when better results were not obtained by the RPO.

An Incentive to Change

Sometimes, these challenges are caused when corporate hiring authorities are strapped with an outdated set of hiring policies and procedures' that are slow, cumbersome and uncompetitive in today's fast-paced, fast-acting search for hard-to-locate talent and then they expect their RPO to be more effective working with the same flawed processes and restrictions that have stifled their own efforts.

When the RPO provider has to adhere to the same business and hiring process procedures and interface with the same number of corporate departments as their internal hiring authorities' do, why are they surprised when results do not dramatically improve?

RPO providers have had to learn that merely getting better talent, faster will not ultimately improve results if they have to go through the same numerous, outdated hiring hoops their customer

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has to endure.

Consequently many early RPO contracts did not get renewed, often due to confusion about who was to do what and how the function was to be performed.

Many early RPO practioners promised more than they could effectively deliver. However, there were challenges created by both the corporate customers and their RPO.

Many large staffing firms and other RPO providers learned that performing the functions better and quicker was the easy part since they could control that part of the process. However, translating their expertise toward getting the desired results for their corporate customers involved a much more complex job than originally anticipated as they often had little influence or control over those corporate processes.

Dealing with the Elephant

One successful RPO practioner described it as wanting to get rid of the 800-pound elephant in the room when they ought to be shining the light on the elephant so they can deal with it.

While RPO has become a catchy buzz term for all sorts of recruiting activities, presently, there may be no more than about 50 companies that are true RPO providers. However, this is a growing number and RPO will be an important factor in the broader staffing industry as more and more corporate employers seek better, more efficient and more cost-effective solutions to attract talent to their organization.

There are challenges working with an RPO for some employers as they now have another important supplier to manage.

These challenges can multiply if the provider is overseas. Outsourcing across geographic, linguistic and cultural boundaries can result in lost potential savings spent on additional management costs.

Experts suggest seeking an RPO provider who is experienced in operating as a partner and who understands how important communication and coordination are to a successful relationship. Be wary of a one-size-fits-all RPO approach.

"This is not a fad; it is more an example of the staffing industry's remarkable ability to re-invent itself by finding and perfecting new solutions to customer's challenges."

Clearly an employer is looking for expertise and/or infrastructure they lack to produce optimum results; however, as with most business matters, a majority of the challenges with a successful RPO relationship are people-related.

It is important to understand the values and recruiting policies of the RPO provider and that they have the bandwidth and quality of people needed to deliver the required results in a timely fashion.

It is vitally important to spell out in writing who has responsibility and accountability for each step in the process. However, be aware that you won't always discover all of them until the first few months of work. That is why some RPOs insist on terming the contract a pilot at the onset.

Clearly even with its challenges, corporate employers continue to support this function. Overall, companies and their RPO providers have learned from their earlier efforts and mistakes and the advantages far out weigh the challenges.

This is not a fad; it is more an example of the staffing industry's remarkable ability to re-invent itself by finding and perfecting new solutions to customer's challenges.

RPO providers from the Staffing sector have found a whole new set of competitors aside from their usual challengers for business and market share; now they face firms such as Accenture, AON, Hewitt, IBM, Fidelity Insurance and others who want their share of this booming market place. These firms can process and consult but can they effectively recruit?

Staffing firms need to bring their "A" game to stay afloat in these deeper waters. They know recruitment but can they process large numbers of candidates and can they consult to their clients?

We expect to see mergers and joint ventures between firms that may have one or more but perhaps not all of the needed components to be strong enough to succeed in this space.

All RPO firms have some of the needed elements to a certain degree; few have all components operating at top efficiency.

Needed for Growth

The major component elements needed for successful RPO growth are:

- An excellent end-to-end process, with technology to create a proven methodology to deliver results;
- A well-established distribution channel, many strong customer relationships;
- An offshore or onshore capacity to lower transactional costs for certain parts of the recruitment process;
- The discipline, credibility and determination to only accept assignments when they can influence the clients' hiring process when needed, to obtain positive results on the hiring decisions.

Creating a true RPO can require a significant investment of resources. One possible future trend is for local and regional staffing firms to partner with a qualified RPO to provide these services to their existing clients. The local staffing firm has the relationships with its customers and the RPO has the expertise and staff to deliver the solutions.

However, to reap the potential benefits from RPO, corporate customers may need to examine each step of their hiring process and relax whatever they can to give themselves a fighting chance in the war for talent. Their future will depend on attracting and retaining talent.

RPO is a trend that will only grow larger as employers and RPOs get better at clearly identifying their respective roles in the process.❏