

## **How to Work with a Retained Search Firm – A Candidate’s Perspective**

*Understanding how a retained search firm operates is key to effectively working with one.*

A common misconception about retained search is that it is the recruiter’s job to find a job for you. Search firms work **with** you **and** their clients to find a match of expertise and experience to fill a specific position. A recruiter in a retained search firm doesn’t solicit resumes and then go to a corporation and find a position to fit the resume. They begin with the client corporation that has the need and then proceed to source candidates that will meet that specific need.

### **What does the process look like?**

Retained search firms have established relationships with companies, and they work to understand their business, culture and leadership. After working with the client company, and understanding their strategic opportunities, the search firm and company work together to define the technical, cultural, and relational aspects of the position, and write a specification and job description. The search firm interviews the company’s management team and hiring manager, gathers their input and then, using contacts and a variety of other resources, sources candidates specific to the requirements of the position. Many search firms have accumulated a database of potential candidates and have access to other databases, research tools and associations through which they can identify appropriate candidates to form a candidate pool. Once this pool is identified they begin the process of contacting individuals in the pool to gather additional candidate information that will help determine the “right fit”. They will conduct face-to-face interviews, verify credentials and develop profiles to summarize the unique qualifications of each candidate they will present to the client company. The profile of each individual candidate is shared with the client company and at that point the client decides whether the candidate warrants future consideration. The company will usually conduct their own interviewing and referencing process leading to a job offer or further candidate identification.

### **Why do companies use search firms?**

Corporations benefit from using a search firm in two ways. Using a search firm eliminates the time and expense associated with advertising the open position and addressing a long list of applicants, many of whom will not meet the specifications of the position for various reasons. A search firm does the intense and time-consuming work of finding the best available candidates, and providing a thorough screening mechanism, which saves the corporation valuable time.

Another benefit for a client is the efficiency and thoroughness with which the search firm works. The hiring company may not have the resources or expertise to devote to finding the ideal candidate. A qualified search firm has established relationships with a variety of corporate and business clients and has developed a process to efficiently and effectively source candidates.

### **How should I handle a call from a recruiter?**

Think of recruiters as professional consultants who are representing the hiring company. They are calling you because based on available information or a referral, your background is somewhat likely to fit the position requirements. A recruiter is concerned about efficiency and will not waste your time on a position that is clearly not right for you. From time to time they will contact you to let you know of their clients’ specific need and to better understand your background and experience.

Recruiters may contact you if they have a position that fits your profile or to ask you to recommend other people who might be qualified for the job. If **you** make the first contact, it is best to send a resume and cover letter so the recruiter has an opportunity to become familiar with your background and experience. If you were referred by someone familiar with the firm, let the firm know. Provide more than one way of reaching you: home phone, cell phone and e-mail address. Many recruiters maintain their own database of candidates as a way of contacting qualified candidates. It's likely that if today's position is not a fit, knowing your expertise makes you accessible when an appropriate position comes along. By providing your current resume and description of your skill set, you will become part of the search firm's database that can be tapped in the future. Some search firms may specialize in particular professional areas; financial, engineering, technical, operations (to name a few) or a certain geographical area. This information can help you narrow the field of search firms with whom you could establish a relationship. We would recommend that you familiarize yourself with the differences between retained and contingent firms, as outlined in our website.

### **What is the advantage of working with a retained search firm?**

Think of them as a source for "hidden" job leads. Many searches are confidential and not advertised to the general public. Being presented by a search firm is an important introduction to the hiring company. You enter with a "pre-approved" status which is a real leg up. Companies that use retained search firms are likely to be financially stable and have put a good deal of thought into the needed position. The search firm can act as a trusted source of information about the hiring company and provide insight into the hiring and interviewing process, and they can help you in the negotiation phase with the company once an offer has been made. A successful placement is a win/win for everyone: the hiring company, the search firm and the candidate.

### **Some tips:**

- **Be responsive.** Be open to the recruiter's call. Networking is always a good strategy for career growth.
- **Be timely.** If you say you will provide a resume, do it promptly. Return the recruiter's call or email and let them know if you are interested in the job.
- **Be helpful.** If the position isn't right for you, recommend a colleague or individual in your network that may be suitable.
- **Be honest.** Don't misrepresent your credentials, salary requirements or interest level. It isn't productive for you or the recruiter to inflate your background and experience, or misrepresent yourself. Remember, verification of education credentials and background is part of the process.
- **Be open:** If the first position isn't right for you, tell the recruiter to keep you in mind for other appropriate positions that may come up in the future.

