

Should you work with a recruiter?

Some people estimate that only 1 percent to 3 percent of all resumes sent will result in actual job interviews. That translates to sending out 50 resumes resulting in no more than two interviews. Many positions are confidential replacements, so you may never hear about them because the company seeking to hire is working with a recruiter. Working with the right recruiter will open many more doors for you.

Here are some Frequently Asked Questions about dealing with recruiters.

1) I'm job-hunting...should I send my resume to recruiters?

A reputable search firm staffed by good recruiters can be a real help, guiding you in exploring new opportunities. Different recruiters know about different positions. They do not all know about the same ones.

2) How does it work?

A reputable firm will not share your resume with any employer or give your name to anyone else without obtaining your specific permission to do so. The recruiter will call first, talk to you about a particular position, confirm your ability to do the job, and learning about your interests, personal goals, and career plan. Then, after mutual agreement, the recruiter will present your credentials to the prospective employer.

3) There are so many firms! Which one is best for me?

First, understand that there are different levels of recruiting firms. A Search Firm usually works for select clients; often they specialize in one or more industries or job classifications. They "headhunt" the best talent for their corporate clients by conducting an extensive "search." That is why they are called search firms.

Simultaneously, they can search out the best opportunity for a candidate because they usually have a well-established network, know the companies interested in hiring new talent, and have a good feel for which ones are solid, stable employers who hire people with your specific skills. Many search firms follow people throughout their careers, continually assisting an individual in building a solid career. These relationships can be mutually beneficial down the road, when the candidate that they have placed within a company calls the Search Firm to assist in hiring needs to help build a team within the new company.

Retained firms usually work for a corporate client on specific searches. They will call you only when they have a specific search for which you may be qualified. This may not be at a time when you are ready or want to change.

Employment agencies work with on a wide variety of openings and usually are proficient at "matching" a resume of a candidate with job openings. They can effectively generate interviews if you "match up," but may have neither the time nor expertise needed to give you "one-on-one" career assistance.

4) How many recruiting firms should I contact?

It is not advisable to send your resume out indiscriminately. At the same time, if you contact only a few, you may not hit the market sufficiently. There is the possibility that none you send to will be working on positions for which you are suited.

5) So how do I select the one that is right for me?

Be sure you are working with a firm that handles your industry, be it health care, finance, manufacturing, information technology or some other specialization.

Confirm that the firm works in your area of expertise by asking questions. How many of their clients are in your industry? What percentage of their clients works exclusively with them? Some of the larger generalist firms will note that they have one or more search consultants that specialize in specific fields. Ask about their particular track record. Time – your time – is important. If you are wasting time with an inappropriate search firm the best opportunities may pass you by.

It is important for you, as a job hunter, to assess the recruiters' knowledge of your field. If you use industry buzzwords in describing your skills, experience, or career aspirations, you may or may not be talking a language the recruiter understands fully. It is wise to explore fully with the recruiter his/her understanding of your field and area of specialization.

6) Should I worry about confidentiality?

Check out the reputation of the search firm. Ask around. If it is privately owned, ask about the owner. What are his/her ethics? A firm's good reputation is invaluable, both to them and to you.

A wonderful aspect of working with a reputable search firm is that you can manage your career and your job search in confidence and privacy. Oftentimes you will develop a long-term relationship of trust with your recruiter, who will follow you throughout your career and be your "career consultant" as well as a good confidante.

7) Are all the best jobs listed with a recruiter?

Not always, but often. Generally, an employer does not engage a recruiter's assistance in filling a position unless it is one that is important to the company. Additionally, in many cases a job opening is highly confidential, and your hearing about it through advertising or "word of mouth" is highly unlikely.

Employers will also engage search firms to save them the valuable time of advertising or combing through dozens of resumes. They know a good search firm will have access to hidden talent. Employers want to hire the best person available: not just the individual looking at help wanted ads on a specific day, but the one conscientiously performing his duties, while seeking to build his career and keep his options open for exceptional opportunities.

8) Will it cost me money?

No. Fees are always paid by the employer, not the job candidate. Because of this, sometimes a candidate thinks "well then, they are really an agent of the employer so they'll be more loyal to employers than they are to me." Such thinking is inaccurate!

A good search firm knows the key to staying in business year after year is client satisfaction. Clients are satisfied when they are provided with highly skilled, happy, satisfied long-term employees. When negotiating salaries, recruiters work to see both ends of the coin so they can deliver a win-win situation in which the employee is happy because of the starting package and the employer has been able to hire a stellar performer.

In brief: If you are going to work with a recruiter, invest the time to do it right. It is one of the best investments you can make for your career success.