

May 2006, Loyalty - All for One not One for All

Your organization has achieved the distinction of being a market leader by providing your customers with the very best products or services. You are committed to meeting their needs and giving them the best possible customer experience each and every time. By fulfilling their expectations, you are rewarded with repeat business, referrals and hopefully a long term partnership and unwavering loyalty.

Loyalty, however, can be a fleeting thing. In today's "what have you done for me lately world", you are only as good as your next sale. Relationships have become fragile. There is always someone around the corner promising to do it better, faster and cheaper. And your customers are listening. Being held to a high level of performance and consistently meeting that challenge is hard work. But customer loyalty is worth it. In fact, it is priceless. Earning and keeping it is what separates the best companies from the also-rans.

Unfortunately, in the search profession, loyalty has often been considered a foreign concept. The industry has stubbed its toes many times through unethical behavior and bad business practices. The bad apples in the bunch have done nothing but reinforced the notion that it is okay to rob Peter to pay Paul and then turn around and rob Paul.

So called "industry experts" typically rely on their contacts and well worn network to recruit for their clients. However, they are just as likely to turn around and recycle the same people for their client's competitor(s). Over the years, there have been stories about high profile executives who have changed jobs after being contacted by the same recruiter that placed them in their last position. You can be certain that at lower levels in the organization, this occurs on a daily basis.

While having intimate knowledge of a particular industry or market is a valuable asset, it is cheapened when it is not exclusive. Dealing with a specialist because of their focus and perceived ability to conduct a search quickly without regard to how their lack of loyalty can impact business in the long term is not something to be overlooked.

A search firm that only works in a particular industry is dealing with a finite number of companies and potential candidates. Over time, it stands to reason that the specialist is merely helping the same players trade uniforms. Open positions are valuable opportunities to upgrade your organization and increase your competitive edge. When considering the use of a search firm to solve your staffing needs, think about the investment they are willing to make in your organization.

- Do they truly understand your needs?
- Do they take an uncompromising attitude toward ethics?
- Can they be counted on to work for you exclusively and not your competitors?
- Will they act as your advocate?
- Will they safeguard your reputation and maintain strict confidentiality?
- Are they operating under constraints that limit their ability to source the right candidates?

Building a successful, long-term business relationship ultimately depends on delivering consistently good performance. That is what drives loyalty. If loyalty really matters to your company, consider the answers to the questions above when you want the same loyalty from a search firm that you want from your customers.

