

*Max Messmer, Editor*

# Five Keys to Working Effectively with Recruiters

With accounting and finance candidates in high demand, finding top talent can be especially challenging today. Research by our company shows that it takes an average of four weeks to fill a staff-level accounting position and six weeks to bring a new manager on board—

and those numbers are only expected to rise as demand accelerates. What's more, financial professionals skilled in the hottest specialties and technologies may not be actively searching for new employment, and it can require extra effort to locate and recruit these individuals.

One staffing strategy many employers use to overcome these hurdles is engaging the services of a recruiting firm. This is particularly true for managers who have little time to devote to hiring or no experience with the process, those who have attempted to locate hard-to-find accounting talent without success, and in situations where a critical position must be filled immediately.

The best recruiters are well connected in the business community, which gives them access to a much larger pool of candidates than just those responding to help-wanted



ads. But they do their best work when the employer remains a vital part of the hiring process. Often, the steps you take on your end can make all the difference. Here are five ways to help ensure more productive and satisfying working relationships with recruiting firms.

## 1. Select the right firm

Going in, remember to recognize that not all recruiting firms are the same. Choose a firm that understands your company and its unique

needs and demonstrates a sincere interest in fulfilling those needs. Solicit recommendations from colleagues, accounting associations, or your local chamber of commerce.

When screening recruiting firms, look for specialization in accounting and finance, an established local presence, and openness about fees, billing arrangements, and procedures. Be wary of any organization charging candidates for job search services; reputable firms will never do so. Also take note of the level of their staff's professionalism. If representatives leave a bad impression at the beginning—whether it's a matter of failing to return phone calls promptly or lacking full comprehension of your hiring needs—your experience isn't likely to improve over time. You should be confident the firm wants your business and has the experience, expertise, and connections to find appropriately skilled accounting professionals.

## 2. Define your expectations

Offer your recruiting firm very detailed job descriptions for the positions you want to fill. Noting that you want an internal auditor with Sarbanes-Oxley compliance experi-

ence, for instance, may not be sufficient to make a successful match. Explain how the individual's experience will be used on the job so that the recruiter can find someone capable of performing all of the necessary responsibilities.

Be candid about any challenges associated with the position. For instance, if the person will report to an accounting manager who travels frequently, the recruiter can look for candidates who are self-starters and have a history of working well under minimal supervision.

### **3. Meet in person**

While much of the initial groundwork can be performed over the phone, it's worth investing the time in having your primary contact visit your company. Often there are nuances about your work environment or corporate culture that are best conveyed in person. Provide a tour of your office, and introduce the recruiter to key personnel. Also share any promotional or historical materials about your organization so the recruiter can build his or her understanding of your firm.

### **4. Tap into their expertise**

The best recruiters are experts in staffing, compensation, and industry and employment trends. You can take advantage of this knowledge to help enhance the overall staffing strategies used at your company. If you are uncertain how many accountants to add to your team to support future expansion, for instance, your contact can help you determine the right balance for your budget. Additionally, you can gain insights into salary ranges and competitive benefit packages so that your business increases its chances of securing top candidates.

### **5. Stay in touch**

Finally, take the initiative to maintain communication with your recruiting firm. Keep your contact updated on the results of any interviews secured through your own efforts as well as your overall staffing situation, including changes such as new hiring criteria or a need to fill additional accounting positions.

Don't wait to receive a client satisfaction survey in the mail before giving a firm feedback about its performance; share your concern and praise as events arise. Is your main contact meeting your expectations? Are you satisfied with the candidates referred to you? The more knowledgeable a firm's staff is about your preferences and perceptions, the easier it will be to meet your needs going forward.

The best relationships between recruiters and clients are built on a foundation of trust and honesty. Make sure you're confident that you've selected the right partner, and keep the lines of communication open about your requirements. You'll help maximize your return on investment and ultimately improve your hiring process. ■

*Max Messmer is chairman and CEO of Robert Half International Inc. (RHI), parent company of Robert Half® Finance & Accounting, Accountemps®, and Robert Half® Management Resources. RHI is the world's first and largest specialized staffing firm placing accounting and finance professionals on a full-time, temporary, and project basis. Messmer's most recent books are *Motivating Employees For Dummies®* and *Managing Your Career For Dummies®* (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.).*