

# Recruiters: They're Back!



**RIGHT VIEWPOINT™**

## Managing Executive Recruiters for Results

By Sharon Salling – Right Management

After a number of years of getting sand kicked in their faces, executive recruiters are beginning to flex their collective muscles again. According to an April 2011 article by Stephenie Overman published on Fortune.com quoting the Association of Executive Search Consultants (AESC), following a precipitous 32.5% decline in 2009, the industry grew by an average of 28.5% in 2010 and is on track to do well in 2011.

Whether you know them as executive search firms, retained search firms, executive recruiters, or headhunters, they are looking for senior executive talent to present to their clients. If you are earning six figures and you have proven value to offer the marketplace, you should make executive search firms a part of the arsenal of weapons in your job search campaign.

There are two types of executive search firms, retained and contingency. Contingency firms get paid only if someone they identify and present to the client is hired, while retained firms are paid regardless of the outcome of their search assignment. Although contingency firms may be of benefit to you, my comments are focused on retained search, since, in my experience, they have the strongest relationships with employers, have the most to gain when they identify a "home run" candidate, and have the most to lose if they do not meet their clients' needs. Powerful motivation.

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Some key things to keep in mind when working with retained executive recruiters:

1. They do not work for you: they work for their client
2. They do not control the nature or timing of their searches
3. Their goal is to make money for their own firm
4. They aim to deliver a "home run" candidate to every client
5. They are not in business to advance your career, although they will do so if it benefits their client and their own firm

The AESC estimates that retained recruiters act as gatekeepers to 60,000 -70,000 senior level jobs worldwide every year, as reported on Fortune.com, making them a force in the networking and referral of talent.

So, if you're an executive conducting a job search, how should you engage with retained executive search firms to produce the result you want? The short answer is..."Give them what they want." Here are some tips:"

1. **Get out there.** Like it or not, social media is the new darling of recruiters. In an article published in October, 2011 in the Chicago Tribune, Gus G. Sentementes, Tribune Newspapers, writes, "Recruiters are using social networks to better identify top professionals in their fields, connect with them through "word-of-mouth" approaches and lure them with job offers. Nowadays, a typical executive might have a resume posted on LinkedIn, Facebook and Twitter, a blog or their own website — and recruiters are mining those sites, Google and elsewhere for the right candidates." As with all successful product launches, the first rule is to generate awareness. You are the product, so become visible.
2. **Have a history of career achievements that demonstrate delivering results to former employers.** Although this may appear similar to that old saw about the best way to be certain you are a tall child is to choose tall parents, it is never too late to articulate what you have done in a compelling fashion and to back up your contributions with great examples and proof statements. Using social media, such as the "post and update" section on your LinkedIn profile, is a simple way to stay top of mind with all your connections and remind recruiters of your availability.
3. **Reach out to recruiters.** Start with recruiters who previously placed you or a colleague, who worked with your prior employer, who emerge through your networking, and who are active/experts in your target function or industry sectors. Be congenial, be professional, be patient and do not be a stalker. If you have "new news", contact the recruiter, but don't expect him/her to expend effort talking with you if you are not seen as a potential "home run" candidate for the specific search at hand.
4. **When recruiters call, talk to them.** If it's a bad time, get their number and call them back ASAP. If it's a good time, take the call. Be friendly: remember that your goal is to make them want to do business with you. They are likely to position the call with a phrase such as, "I'm calling to see if you know anyone who might be a good fit for a search I'm working on." Fine. Accurate or not, it doesn't matter. This is the beginning of your relationship, with a possible lead to a position you may want. If not, offer to be a source for them and follow through with your contacts to see if anyone is a good fit for you to refer.
5. **Differentiate yourself.** As with product marketing, you need to express your USP – unique selling proposition. Don't oversell, but do press your advantage. John Salveson, co-founder and principal of Salveson Stetson Group retained search, comments, "You need to provide a delicate balance between representing your background in the best possible light and overselling yourself. It's important to make your case for why your experiences match the role - but if you oversell, you may appear desperate." Demonstrate strong personal values and ethics and emphasize areas that

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distinguish you from other talented executives. Are you multi-lingual? ...a life-long learner? ...a community service leader? ...a highly disciplined athlete? ...an accomplished mentor? All else being equal, these characteristics may tip the scales in your favor, especially if your research revealed that the culture of your target company nicely fits with one of your own interests.

6. **After you land, stay out there.** In his Tribune article, Gus G. Sentementes wrote, "Recruiters often are directed to find "passive" candidates — working professionals who might not have considered changing jobs until they received the right offer." Landing does not mean never having to talk with a recruiter again. On the contrary, maintaining the relationships you worked so diligently to establish is likely to continue to pay off for your career, either by helping you identify your own next move or by helping you find and recruit talent for your firm, and in the process establishing yourself as brilliant at building exceptional teams.

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Retained executive search recruiters are here to stay, so take advantage of their relationships and the entrée they may offer into companies that could be the "home run" employer for you.