

EXECUTIVE RECRUITER CANDIDATES TOP 10 RED FLAGS

By Steve Finkel

As the economy rebounds, many owners of search firms will be adding to their staffs. The development of a new consultant is complex and time-consuming, with factors of training and management playing large parts. Yet the best training and management will serve no purpose if the right candidate has not been chosen initially.

The selection of new consultants is a continual struggle for most owners. Many hours are spent determining whom to hire — only to find those hours wasted as the consultant fails. One reason for this is that managers tend to start with the wrong goal. They first attempt to find the perfect candidate, the top 20%. A better and easier approach is to *eliminate* the bottom 80% — and to select from what remains!

The first step in the selection of candidates is for the manager to do exactly what he would for his clients — fill out a search assignment form with the *emphasis on knockout factors*. It is easy to get carried away by the sparkling appearance, personality, or sales background of a candidate. A *written list of negatives* is a strong asset in the prevention of hiring errors.

Following is a list of negatives designed to reduce the investment of time and money in people who would quite probably be unsuccessful in our business. To this list should be added additional factors, which, in your experience, predispose a person towards failure in our business. Obviously, you should delete those factors with which you do not agree. While you may not wish to consider these as *absolute* eliminators, at the very least they should represent major negatives. *They should be*

overlooked only in the face of strong positives in all other areas. Top 10 red flags.

- 1) ***Unwillingness to accept training.*** This business requires extensive training and a person willing to learn. Ask the candidates how they respond to a comprehensive training program. Successful people *want* to learn; others should be discarded. While it is self-evident that most people will claim to be “open to training,” a little observation will separate the serious from those who are just telling you what you want to hear. Such mumblings as “you can always learn something, but selling is selling” is a clear tip-off. Be sure to *ask* about this when checking references. Or, to be sure, give the prospect a book on this industry, and see if it is read.
- 2) ***Person who frequently changes jobs or residences.*** This business requires, above all else, tenacity. People with a track record of moving easily will continue to do so when they encounter difficulties.
- 3) ***Recent divorce (past year).*** This is a high-stress business, especially in the early stages. Any additional stress dramatically reduces chances of success. A recently divorced person is *not* emotionally stable. Wait a year before considering hiring.
- 4) ***Failure in own business in the last year.*** This person has suffered extreme emotional trauma. They will dwell on their failure for a considerable length of time. To hire such a person before they adjust is a mistake.

- 5) **Financial stress.** Those who believe this to be a *positive* because *they* have been successful under this burden overlook the hundreds of others who were not capable of overcoming this handicap. Excess stress *reduces* chances of success.
- 6) **Termination from an executive position.** This person has 2 problems: adjusting to a perceived failure; and the readjustment to a “life in the trenches,” cold-calling and selling. Chances of success within a year of termination are not high.
- 7) **Ill health (including drugs and alcohol).** Any commission-oriented sales position requires physical and mental stamina. Ongoing medical difficulties are a strong negative.
- 8) **Accident proneness.** The *perception* — real or fancied — of oneself as accident-prone says something about an individual’s opinion of themselves. This perception is not conducive to success in any sales business.
- 9) **Extremely rich upbringing.** Nothing comes free in our business. We earn it ourselves. A person who has been earning their way all their life is far more likely to succeed than those who have not.
- 10) **Overly formally educated people.** Many people have been educated beyond their intelligence. This process slows down the speed of thought even more. Recruiting requires a consultant to be “quick on their feet.” Overly formally educated people rarely are.

While any experienced manager can undoubtedly think of people who were successful in overcoming the above negatives, the tendency is to forget the many that were not. When a consultant ultimately washes out of this business after much expense in training time, focus, and money, many managers kick themselves over their original

decision saying, “I should have known better.” Paying closer attention to warning signs will pay dividends in upgrading the quality of the hire.

There are no “sure things” in hiring; there are only decisions where the odds favor success or failure. While some people can certainly overcome odds, good selection consists of eliminating candidates with major negatives — and then hiring the best of those who remain. A manager with this attitude is quite likely to achieve a higher ratio of successful consultants — and thus increase the profitability of his firm.

*The producer of many outstanding training products for our industry including the best-selling book **Breakthrough!**. Steve Finkel has conducted hundreds of in-house and public speaking programs on four continents. Personnel Consultant Magazine, published by NAPS, has described him as possessing “the most in-depth knowledge of search and placement in industry history”. For complete information visit www.stevefinkel.com or call 314-991-3177.*