

## RECRUITER DAILY - March 2011

### Culture issues require honest discussions writes Jo Knox

Recruiters must use their professional judgement to decide whether - and how - to work with clients whose reputation precedes them, says Mindset Group's Aaron Dodd.

In cases where a client's culture or PR issues makes it difficult to source candidates, "you're not obliged to take the job," he reminds recruiters. "A lot of recruiters are desperate to hit targets and they'll take whatever comes without actually thinking about the implications of it."

Mindset has a policy of not working with tobacco companies, Dodd says, but in cases where the decision is less clear-cut, a recruiter should give serious thought to whether the job is actually fillable.

"If the client has got such bad PR that it's going to be next to impossible to fill, then you're really taking money from clients under false pretences, particularly if you're working on a retainer. If you're a contingent recruiter and you say you'll take the job... I personally think you're taking the job under false pretences if you're not going to work on it very hard.

"If it's going to be incredibly hard to fill, and very time consuming, and you do want to take it, then clearly you have to charge more for that."

Dodd says that in these circumstances, a recruiter should explain to the client why they need to charge more, and consider changing other terms of business. Several years ago, he points out, he was asked to recruit for a company whose sexual harassment claims were widely publicised. (The company claimed it had addressed the issues and the perpetrators were gone.) He negotiated a higher fee and that there would be no guarantee as part of the deal.

"Ideally consultants shouldn't be thinking about a candidate just staying through their guarantee - you should be thinking for the long-term," he says. But if the company culture means the candidate doesn't last three months, then the recruiter shouldn't be held responsible.

"I wasn't prepared to offer a guarantee because I wasn't convinced the culture had changed. It's one thing to say it's changed; it doesn't necessarily mean it has changed."

Often, he says, the client will recognise that there is a problem and be open to fixing it. "If they do acknowledge and are aware of it and want to do something about it, it makes that discussion about charging extra - because of the extra work involved - easier as well."

But, he says, "If the issues are of their own making and they're in denial, I repeat, you don't have to take the work."

### **To disclose or not to disclose**

If the client has such a bad name in the market that it's likely to deter people from applying, that might be a reason to omit it from job advertising, Dodd says.

He suggests some recruiters might disagree, and say that including the company name is part of the screening process, but, "I don't necessarily hold to that because I think sometimes perceptions are different to the reality. Perceptions about a company might be several years old, in which case you're better off to keep it blind, and then discuss those with the candidate. If they do have a particular objection you can address that with them."

Before divulging company information to potential candidates, recruiters must ensure they've had frank discussions with the client and know how to respond to candidates' questions.

"Sit down with the client and make sure you're both saying the same things, and that those things are honest and factual. You should both be singing from the same hymn sheet.

"That doesn't mean telling them lies, but having an objective, open and honest conversation about the company, the changes they're looking to make, and those sorts of things.

"Recruiters must be able to have those discussions with candidates. If they're a paper shuffler who's just flicking CVs out they're not going to, but if they're a quality consultant they should be having those discussions.

"They should be open and honest and painting a picture about the opportunities in the business, not painting a rosy picture of something that isn't there."

### **Responding to negative feedback**

When a candidate provides negative feedback about a company and the recruiter hasn't heard it before, their first instinct should be to find out more, Dodd says.

"Ask the candidate why [they think the things they do]. Why do they say that? What are their experiences?"

"If it's just hearsay, then you can address that. Or you can give them references from other employees already working there. We've certainly done those sorts of things in the past - candidates are doing their due diligence on companies as well, and quite often ask if they can speak to other employees in the company. Companies shouldn't have an issue with doing that because other employees and future colleagues should be part of the selection process."

Recruiters should not hesitate to raise these issues with their clients, he adds.

"We divulge everything with our clients. We're working with them in a partnership arrangement to find people to deliver certain results, so we would discuss everything with the client openly and honestly, and if we're getting negative feedback or certain comments coming back from candidates about the company or the job, or the manager [we will tell them]."

### **Don't take risks**

Recruiters can avoid trouble by ensuring they are always honest with candidates in conversations about clients, Dodd says.

If they paint an inaccurate picture of an organisation "to get a backside in the seat", it's short-term thinking, he says. "The person will go into the job, and two months later pull the pin - they've had enough."

"Obviously that means the recruiter has to stand by their guarantee and find a replacement, so they have to do what was already a difficult job, twice."

Recruiters should keep in mind that candidates might opt to launch action against them if they have been deliberately deceptive, he adds.

"If you paint the wrong picture and they go in there and don't like it, the recruiter could be liable for some damages, particularly if that person has upset a career by leaving a good job to go somewhere else."

### **MINDSET**