



BELLOAKS
EXECUTIVE SEARCH

Knowing How to Work with a Professional Search Firm Will Get You the Best Results

By Todd A. Warshaw, Partner of Bell Oaks

You're a professional considering a job change and would like to explore the benefits of working with an executive search firm to maximize your opportunities and earning potential. How should you go about selecting a firm and how does a mutually-beneficial partnership between you—the potential candidate—and the search firm work?

Having interviewed thousands of professionals with many different backgrounds over the years, it is apparent that some candidates know how to take advantage of the services of an executive search firm, while others could benefit from a little guidance. It is also clear that many candidates have had unpleasant experiences working with a firm and can be a bit skeptical by the time they arrive at Bell Oaks. For example, they may have come across firms that:

- Send out candidate resumes to companies without informing or receiving permission from the candidate, or use the candidate's resume as bait with potential client companies even if not officially representing that candidate.
- Poorly communicate and lack follow through with the candidate throughout the process.
- Misrepresent an opportunity and/or convince a candidate to interview with companies and for positions they have no interest in or are not qualified for.
- Doesn't properly interview or even meet the candidate, thus presenting irrelevant opportunities because they have no knowledge of what's important to the candidate.
- Refuses to return a candidate's call with feedback after an interview once it is determined that the company will not be moving forward with the candidate.

There are others, but I think you get the picture. So, how would professionals know which executive search firm to work with and how the relationship should progress once the initial contact is made? If you have no prior knowledge or information regarding the firm or individual you're considering working with, here are some basic questions to ask:

- How long has the firm been in business? Decades in business means proven and established relationships.
- How long has the individual you met with been in the business and with the firm? Tenure and experience is significant in executive search.
- What types of clients and industries does the firm represent? Does it specialize in any specific industry or type of position?
- Generally, what levels of positions does the firm specialize in placing?

These topline questions should allow you to evaluate the professionalism of the firms you are considering. They are pretty straightforward, so if the answers you receive are vague ... move on!

- more -

WWW.BELLOAKS.COM

678.287.2000 • 678.287.2001
One Glenlake Parkway, Suite 1000, Atlanta, Georgia 30328

Once you have selected the firm or firms you want to work with, educate yourself on how the relationship should proceed. Some things to consider:

First, the recruiter should conduct a thorough interview with you, ideally face to face. No one can properly represent you if they don't know you beyond a resume. The purpose here is to understand a candidate's background as well as learn about career goals, personal circumstances that may affect a job change decision, and preferences on what is considered a compelling opportunity.

After the initial interview, it is important to understand the process the recruiter normally follows. Ask how often you will talk and what's the best way to contact them? When should you check in and if that is even necessary? How does the process move forward once an opportunity is identified, and what is the recruiter's involvement once interviews begin? What kind of information can you expect regarding the company and position for which you are being considered?

As soon as an opportunity is identified, frequent communication between the candidate and recruiter is essential. The recruiter should give you a great deal of information regarding the company and the people you are meeting. If not, it's a clear sign that there is no strong connection between the recruiter and the company. While not absolutely critical, you benefit most working with firms that have long established relationships with clients.

Now the interviews are underway. From a professional standpoint, how should you and the recruiter interact? A recruiter's responsibility once the interview cycle has begun should include *at least* the following:

- Informing the candidate of where things stand in the interview process, and where the candidate stands via feedback from completed interviews.
- Sharing information for the candidate before each round of interviews.
- Being available for any and all questions during the interview cycle.
- Professionally "closing the loop" once the job is filled—whether filled by you or not.

Remember, this is a partnership. Your responsibility during the interview process is:

- Open and honest communication regarding your feedback from each interview, your continued interest level in the position, and any personal situation that ultimately affects your decision if you become the selected candidate.
- Candid dialogue regarding your current compensation package as well as your expectations for making a job or career change.
- Go through your recruiter to contact the company you are interviewing with unless specifically asked to do otherwise. Circumventing him or her can work against you, especially if that person has a strong relationship with the company.
- As you expect the same, respond to your recruiter in a professional and timely manner. Be accessible and available.

Ultimately, educating yourself on the role of executive search firms will result in a mutually-beneficial partnership. Your definition of success will be in sync. You'll both have the same agenda. And as a professional, you should accept nothing less.

Todd A. Warsaw is a partner at Bell Oaks, a 37-year-old executive search firm based in Atlanta (www.belloaks.com). He can be reached at twarslaw@belloaks.com or 678.287.2014.