

HR Director Asks: Why Does it Take Us So Long to Make a Hire?

Dear Stephen,

I am an HR executive in Grand Rapids for a major manufacturer. I am at the director level, working with field sales, primarily in hiring and recruitment. I report directly to the vice president of HR. We have a large department, comprised of in-house recruiters who identify candidates for everything from sales positions to marketing to local factory people. We use a combination of LinkedIn, online platforms, referrals from current employees, ads and just about every other resource available under the sun to find candidates. We really bring out all the stops for our field sales positions, which, as you know, generate the majority of our revenue.

Sorry to tell you, but we try our absolute hardest to avoid paying recruiting fees to headhunters either on contingency or retainer.

We do have a small budget for outside recruiters for difficult to fill positions and sales jobs in metropolitan markets, where our internal recruiters can't seem to find the right candidates. On the whole though, I think we have a decent in-house operation set-up. And yet, whether we are doing the recruiting or an outside firm is involved, the whole process seems to take longer than ever before. The VP and regional managers are on our cases all the time, saying that we are not filling positions fast enough for their needs. The longer a position remains open, the more revenue we lose.

Nothing personal, but why can't our HR team get better and faster results on its own? And for that matter, why can't outside recruiters work faster?

Buying Time for Hires



You can send your workplace questions to Stephen at: StephenSays@bellow.press.

Questions selected to be answered, will appear in this column. Please use the Subject: Stephen Says for all emails. Stephen Viscusi is a bestselling author, television personality, and CEO of The Viscusi Group, global executive recruiters located in New York. Follow Stephen on Twitter @WorkplaceGuru, Like Stephen on Facebook; and follow him on LinkedIn.

Dear Buying Time,

It seems like we have come full circle. I have been writing this column for a year now, and, if I remember correctly, one of the first questions I answered also had to do with departments that couldn't hire quickly enough. All of which is to say, another year goes by and still there are hiring issues.

I am happy to share the secret of recruiting your own salespeople, even if it takes money out of my pocket, because there is enough business to go around right now. It's my secret to "bulletproof" your department from the inces-

sant complaints of VPs of sales and regional managers about how long it is taking to fill positions. The Viscusi Group teaches this to our consulting clients all the time. This all-important secret is that hiring has less to do with HR and much more to do with your regional sales managers in the field than anyone knows.

Good people are not jumping to leave their jobs for no reason.

Depending on the size of your company, it may be the VP of sales or local managers who need to step up. Field sales managers should be having lunch with candidates all the time, even when they do not have openings in their departments. Field sales managers should know all the salespeople from competing manufacturers and dealers, so they can swoop in when the time is right. They should talk to the A&D community and ask who the best reps are and even ask the dealers. A sales manager's job is not only to manage their current sales people, but also to be constantly searching for new talent and learning about the competition.

I remember a Knoll regional VP telling me that he has lunch at least three times a month with a salesperson from the competition. Great idea, right? Remember, a sales manager is not just a glorified sales person; they need

to be hands-on during hiring in the field, too. I deliver workshops on this to regional managers all around the world, and they're some of our biggest sellers. Everyone has to get on the same page with this.

Another resource that you might forget about amidst running millions of online searches is mining the information of those who already work for you. What I mean, of course, is that you should ask your own sales staff who they know is good from the competitors. They see these competitors every day in the field. Keep a large database, because sooner or later, there will be a window of opportunity to poach one of those people. Getting to know candidates and building a relationship is the start to a smooth hiring process. You will learn who you do not want, as well as who you do want.

Yes, recruiting new salespeople is an HR function, but in field sales it should be part of the local sales manager's responsibility. That is, a smart manager should know their competition in the field and should have a list of potential candidates at the ready. Otherwise, you have some HR person trying to recruit from LinkedIn in their workstation in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. These HR people can find candidates, but it usually does not work well. If it did, me and a dozen other companies like mine would not exist. I even think a sales manager's performance review should consider

how many candidates they are able to recruit themselves. I'm shooting myself in the foot here, but only an out-of-touch — literally and figuratively — sales manager would need a headhunter to tell them who they should hire from a competitor within their local market. Some managers might not want to make that call, but that's where HR comes in. Some people think this poaching business is unsavory. If you are one of these people, then you do not belong in your job.

As far as taking a long time to wine and dine and wheel and deal until the ink is dry, that is just the way it is today, which is why this needs to be an ongoing process. Good people are not jumping to leave their jobs for no reason. Plus, there will be counter offers and negotiations (if there aren't, then rethink the hire). All in all, the average search takes six months in the best of circumstances. That is why you managers should be interviewing all the time. Our clients that complain about the time frame, complain because they took too long to pull the trigger and start the search. You want to have the right candidate ready when the job opens up so the rest of the story can start immediately. Don't kid yourself, this stuff takes time, but if you're looking before you need to be, then the clock starts once you're already much farther along in the process. This will help keep the screaming VPs at bay.

Stephen