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## How to Work with a Recruiter

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Working with recruiters often feels like a guessing game. It's nerve-wracking for job seekers to learn the process as they go. They wonder how to make time to scout, screen and interview recruiters during the workday. Perhaps you can relate. Sometimes it seems like your search is at a stand still – even with so many moving pieces. Maybe you have other roadblocks that freeze your progress – trying to sell yourself, remembering 'everything' you've ever done in your career, explaining a bad situation and why you left, or writing a simple thank you note that hits the right points.

Well, it's time to take a deep breath. While we cannot change the time required for an effective job search, there are some tips for working with recruiters to get the most out of your time. This article will provide some insights from recruiters' points of view. How they look at the whole process, what they really think when you ask for a 7 a.m. interview and what you can do to make your partnership successful.



### Taking the Screening Call

When actively searching, the first rule of thumb is to avoid answering your cell phone unless you are in the perfect position to talk. As many job seekers have figured out, answering your phone while walking past your manager's desk does not work well. You end up sounding disorganized and unprepared to the recruiter – and your manager.

Take advantage of caller ID and let calls from unknown people go to voice mail. Only return calls to recruiters when you are in a position to speak freely. Lynn Diegel, Executive Vice President of a market research firm and former hiring manager, says, "Don't go to Starbucks. That constantly running blender in the background is a distraction." She suggests calling from your car (your parked car!) or finding another quiet place to return her call. And, don't worry about calling back within five minutes – simply getting back to the recruiter by the end of the next business day is perfectly acceptable.

### Scheduling the Interview

Every recruiter interviewed for this story gave the same piece of advice: give the recruiter blocks of time when you will be available to interview. John Ferrel, a recruiter at The Heiden Group, advises "My job is to drive the interview process. The candidate needs to give me windows of time that work for them to schedule these meetings. When someone can offer consistent blocks of available time from week to week, it makes my job easier." And those early morning hours? No problem – recruiters agree that whenever possible they will work with your availability, whether it be 7 a.m. or 6 p.m.

What if you have a lot of freedom and can interview anytime? "Don't be too available – it doesn't give me any structure in trying to set up an interview," says Ferrel. "Stick to offering blocks."

Travel a lot? Not to worry. "I'll wait for someone to return from a business trip without an issue, especially if their resume is interesting," says Bernie Siegel, a former recruiter and current President of the International Coach Federation of New York City. Lynn Diegel agrees wholeheartedly, but on the flip-side advises that candidates should not claim to be in 'all-day meetings' constantly. She wants the potential employee to be low-maintenance. Scheduling multiple managers and candidates is already difficult enough without having to battle the unavailable job seeker.

Whatever your entry point, you need to be realistic and respectful of employers' and recruiters' time. Knowing the demand level for your particular skill set and expertise can also help you. Professionals in mid-level positions with widely-available skills can expect less flexibility, but those coming from senior-level positions and specialty fields may experience a bit more freedom. Based on that, you can gauge employers' potential flexibility and willingness to accommodate your needs in the interview process.

### Selling Yourself

Just because a recruiter has contacted you does not mean you should stop marketing yourself. "Help me sell you to the employer; help me build a best-case scenario for your candidacy," requests Ferrel. "Articulate why the position is a good fit for you. Pull out a story about your sales experience, your best engineering qualifications, or the projects you have managed."

Tony Shea of The Heiden Group advises, "Sales candidates should be able to discuss their statistical achievements. Performance, quotas, numbers, commissions." In general, candidates need to be ready and willing to discuss their resumes in a succinct, concise manner.

Putting together several pertinent S.T.A.R. stories will help you communicate your accomplishments and selling points to a recruiter. S.T.A.R. is a story-telling strategy which stands for Situation, Task, Action, Result. The strategy helps you stay on track when describing an accomplishment and drives you from the beginning to end of a story. For example: "[Situation] At XYZ Company we had a line of widgets to market in a new territory. [Task] These same widgets were very well received in other territories, so our job was to educate buyers in the market and show the value of placing these widgets on their store shelves. [Action] I went store-to-store with samples of the widgets and requested meetings with the store buyers. Since my product was easy to demonstrate, I was often able to meet with the buyer right away. [Result] Results were impressive. Buyers liked the product and would place orders immediately. Ultimately, I achieved 85% integration into the market and reached \$650,000 in sales in just three months."

Take time to re-familiarize yourself with your career. Put together S.T.A.R. stories for each position and be able to talk

about your value and your takeaways from each job over the years. If you have maintained a strong network, you can reach out to your former co-workers and managers to discuss past projects and company successes.

### Discussing Personal Roadblocks

Some candidates feel very open when working with recruiting firms – as if they can divulge things to the recruiter that they would not in an employer–candidate interview scenario. There is some flexibility and openness in the recruiter–candidate relationship, but do not assume you can discuss anything.

Shea and Ferrel have been told about candidates' divorce struggles, potential cross–country moves, and other deeply personal issues. "It's an interview process, not a personal declaration. Keep the information you present pertinent to the job – focus on the job skills." Shea says. However, divulging something personal that affects a job requirement is essential. For example, if driving is a requirement of a position (like outside sales in a suburban market) and you do not have a drivers' license, you need to tell the recruiter upfront. This said, you do not have to go into the reasons behind that fact.

### Sending Thank You Notes and Email Etiquette

"Yes, thank you notes are required," expresses Diegel. "Simply make a few connections between your experience and my needs. And, don't assume I'll remember you – a quick reminder of when you interviewed and something we discussed is great to jog my memory."

Thank you notes should be sent within 24 hours of the interview. Remember to collect business cards from each person you meet so you can send individual notes to everyone. Your note does not have to be long – just acknowledge your appreciation of their time and point out a skill, talent, or experience that makes you the ideal candidate for the position. While recruiters and employers will always have their personal preferences, both email and regular mail are widely accepted for thank you notes.

One thing that does not waiver from the employer's point of view is your professional presentation, especially with email. Follow appropriate grammar rules and do not get creative with spelling or punctuation. It is not a text message – make a good impression in every note you send throughout the job search process. And, always include your phone number with your full name on your signature line.

Following each of the above tips can help you in the interview process. Recruiters and employers actually want you to be right candidate for a job – it means they can stop their search – but you need to do your part to get in front of them and market yourself. Good luck!

*Kimberly Schneiderman is the owner of [City Career Services](#), a company that provides job search tools including [Resumes](#), [Cover Letters](#), and [Interview Workshops](#) to goal-oriented professionals at all levels and across all industries.*

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