

The Minds of HR Pros and Recruiters

Articles, Tips, and Words of Wisdom for Six Figure Earners

Career Advice	Job Search	Interviewing	Networking	Personal Branding	Resume	Salary
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By KIMBERLY SCHNEIDERMAN

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Do you ever wonder what goes on behind the scenes after you apply for a job? How do recruiters fill those seemingly elusive positions? What goes on in their minds as they choose one candidate over another? Well, for all of you curious job seekers out there, today we have the answers! Several recruiters and HR professionals have come together to address your most popular questions about the recruiting process.



1. Where are the best places to look for your company's open positions?

At the senior and executive-level (i.e. those making \$100,000 or more in annual salary), specialty job boards like TheLadders.com and niche boards like dice.com and mediabistro.com are the go-to places for most recruiters to post their jobs and search for top-notch candidates. Recruiters and hiring managers like the narrow focus of these particular job boards and the higher quality responses they receive over the general job boards. Some recruiters, like Linda, an HR professional for a large digital entertainment/media company, also use social networking sites like LinkedIn and Facebook to scout and recruit candidates.

Susan Smith, of Smith Pro Associates, was quick to point out that she doesn't use job boards for any of her HR recruiting firm's open positions. She simply refers to the database of professionals she's built through 20+ years as a recruiter. In fact, she takes on new candidates by referral only. Susan's business model is evidence that it's just as important for job seekers to network and build relationships with recruiters in their industry as it is to apply for jobs posted on specific job boards.

2. What do you look for in a resume?

This question garnered several classic responses such as "typos are not tolerated" and "disorganized information is confusing" and "self-serving objectives are a turn-off." Most interviewers agreed that a well-written resume for a candidate that didn't quite meet job qualifications would grab - and keep - their attention over the poorly written resume of someone with perfect skills.

It's also important to note that each resume is viewed on a case-by-case basis. All of our participants said they could get hundreds of responses to job ads in a single day for conventional positions, but for highly specialized jobs, they're lucky to get five in total. With that in mind, Linda says, "For the mainstream jobs, the resume needs to reflect work experience that is specific to both the industry and the open position." And, for the highly specialized positions, it's a good move to match your resume with the specific expertise required to ensure your position as a top candidate.

"Bottom line," Rusty D'Aversa, an author and job search coach, says, "The more applicants there are for a position, the better the resume has to be." That means showcasing your projects and accomplishments apart from your responsibilities.

Marjorie Grant, a recruiting specialist with Aavis Resources, says being too diverse in your professional pursuits is a distraction. "When candidates have jumped from industry to industry, it shows me a lack of focus and infers they won't stay in one place very long. My clients demand more stability than that. I don't even look twice at the resume."

When Susan is looking at her database of candidate resumes, she says, "It's OK if I do not have a current resume, but the candidate needs to get me a well-written, updated version within two days."

3. What is your company's typical screening process like?

Terry Bradley, a volunteer from the Society of Human Resource Management who works for GlaxoSmithKline, says HR managers use telephone screens to do everything from ensuring an appropriate fit to clarifying if a candidate is expecting relocation expenses. "If a candidate is trying to move to NYC from Texas, they need to address the reasons why in a cover letter," Terry says. "Also, they need to specify if they're looking for expense reimbursement. It simply just isn't available for all positions."

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Linda conducts a full-blown interview via telephone screening whenever possible. She expects candidates to be able to speak to all of their experiences (not just their most recent position) and requires a straight answer when asking about salary expectations. "I only pass on 1 in 5 candidates to hiring managers," she says. "I can't waste anyone's time with candidates that don't fit our needs."

During her telephone screens, Susan goes beyond job related questions. She wants to ensure that the candidate fits her client's corporate culture before she passes them on to the next step. "I assess not only their skills, but also their personality. I want to be confident that a placement will be a good match for my client's environment."

4. How can a candidate stand out?

Most of our recruiters use behavioral interview questions to determine an appropriate fit for a position. For example, they might ask you to describe a specific situation you've faced in your career and how you handled it. Or, they might give you a hypothetical task and have you detail how you would approach the problem, including actions you would take and roadblocks you expect to encounter. Using the S.T.A.R. (Situation - Task - Action - Result) strategy for answering questions will help you develop clear and concise responses.

"Don't ramble and don't dance around an answer," Rusty says. "Get to the point, and use a real-life situation, complete with results, to demonstrate your expertise."

When Linda is interviewing you, you had better know your stuff! She emphasizes, "Professionally-written resumes are great - they make a candidate stand out - but the candidate also needs to communicate the details of their accomplishments and projects, especially for older positions."

5. Everyone knows they're supposed to do research before an interview, but what does a candidate *really* need to know?

Rusty says to go beyond just looking at a company website. Perform a Google search on a company, read press releases, learn about new products, review financial reports, and become familiar with key players. "Make ties between the position at hand and the company's strategic initiatives that you discover in your research."

Marjorie reminds her candidates to be familiar with all the information she gives them during the initial screening, especially the description of the position for which they're interviewing. "Many candidates show up to an interview without even digesting the basic job description. It really hurts their candidacy."

6. What will blow a candidate's chance for a job?

Linda tells me that those candidates with too many jobs that "weren't the right fit" are red flags for her. "One or two jobs over a long history that don't work out are ok; but people with four or five positions like that indicate a pattern."

Susan doesn't want to hear that the only reason you're interested in a job is to make more money. "It can't be the only reason. It doesn't sell well to the employer. Describe why the position is a good fit and how you'll contribute to the employer's goals."

Another red flag is the amount of time you have been interviewing. Rusty says, "If you've had a long job search, your tools are broken. Get professional help with your resume, cover letter, and interviewing skills."

7. What about the dreaded salary question?

Marjorie advises her candidates to be able to champion for their own expertise and skill set. "No one will pay you more than your value because you need to cover your commute or day care costs. Be able to define how your experience demands a higher wage."

Terry reminds us that knowing the value of your current salary package is important in negotiations for a new position. "Sometimes people don't understand the entire worth of the benefits package offered. Candidates will focus on the base salary, without taking into account a 401K plan, education reimbursement, health benefits, or vacation time." Remember that sometimes you'll need to balance and compromise. Is a shorter commute or two weeks more vacation time worth accepting a little less in salary?

8. What advice do you have for candidates at \$100,000+ level?

Linda is clear in her advice: "If you say you have time to talk now when I call with a telephone screen, you'd better be prepared. Don't type emails, don't talk to anyone, be in a quiet place, and focus on our conversation."

Susan advises candidates to define the companies they've worked for on their resume. "I want to know, by looking at your resume, if your former company was a large power train manufacturer, or a mid-size consultant firm specializing in the finance sector. This helps me understand the scope of your previous positions."

In addition to researching information about the company, Rusty advises that you research salaries in preparation for the inevitable conversation. "Look at salary tool sites to determine what professionals with your level of experience and in your city can expect."

Now that you have some more insight into this process, it's time to analyze your job search strategies.

What changes do you want to make to your process? Are your interviewing points and value propositions descriptive and well defined? Are you comfortable using the S.T.A.R. technique? Is your resume answering the employers' needs as these professionals have described? Learning to sell yourself well doesn't come naturally to most people; it takes time and work. You may need professional assistance to get your search tools in order.

All of our recruiters and HR professionals featured in this article assure me that they really do want each candidate to be the right one for the job. Taking steps to meet their needs is the right strategy for reaching your goals. Good luck!

Kimberly Schneiderman is 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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