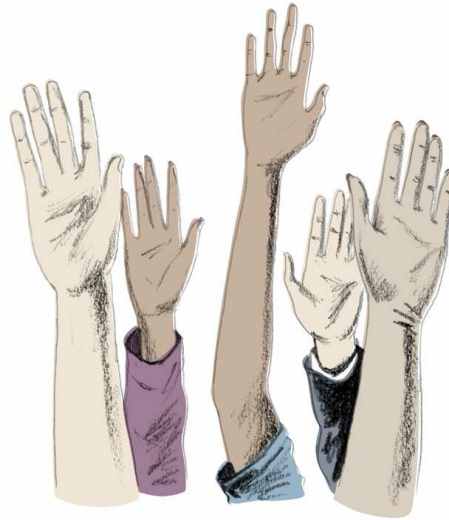


# When the headhunter calls you

So the headhunter called you? The way we all link up on LinkedIn, Facebook, Google+ and other business and social network, it was just a matter of time before you too got the call. But now what? Most headhunters appreciate that you don't play hard to get.

It's absolutely fine that you feel a sense of pride being sought after; on the other hand, you don't want to run around the office with your arms up and let your supervisor and colleagues know who just called you. Jealousy is always a bad thing and this may even lead to suspicion by your superiors that you are contemplating an exit in the near future. Perhaps more importantly, even though the headhunter called does not mean you already got the job. Better keep your hair on as they say in English (keep calm and do not over-react).

If you have been trained in how to deal with newspaper and TV reporters, you already know that it's advisable to say you are busy right now and ask to be called again later. That gives you some time to gather your thoughts and be better prepared. Likewise when the headhunter calls. You are in control and if you don't have complete privacy then don't even attempt to answer with hints or suggestive comments. Not stating your position in a clear manner will be a disadvantage to your rating with the executive search firm. And the walls might have ears. Simply state that this is not a good time but you welcome a talk later in the day. If the call comes in on your office telephone then give your mobile telephone number to offer more flexibility.



Most people I call are somewhat surprised when I introduce myself. There is never a notice or warning beforehand and the call comes unexpected. I hear comments like "Oh, but I have a job already" or "Err, how did you find me?". Executive search firms focus on passive candidates and not active job seeking applicants. Passive candidates amount to 84% of an average labour market according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics and most are not in recruitment databases or job boards. Unless you know how to find these passive candidates, but in particular how to present a compelling sales pitch for your company (HR) or your client (recruiters), this big group of people will never become a hunting ground.

If you are perfectly happy where you are and get a call from the headhunter, it never hurts to listen to what the headhunter has to say. Listening is the key here. You need to figure out if the

headhunter is calling to qualify you as a potential candidate or if they want to tap into your business network for referrals. Whatever may be the reason, don't burn your bridges and hang up. A big favour will likely be remembered and your helpfulness could be your ticket to meet with your favourite headhunter. Some of us have suddenly been at the wrong company at the wrong time and desperately needed professional advice how to get the next job. And during a long career most of us would have considered a job change, right? Wouldn't it have been nice to have had a headhunter on speed dial?

To avoid disappointment and get your expectations right, always ask the recruiter if their assignment is a retained search or a contingency job. Retained means that a client has paid the executive search firm money up front and is working closely with the headhunter on an exclusive basis. Both parties have a keen interest in sticking together over the months it may take to research, prospect, engage and assess talented candidates. Candidates in executive search will always meet the headhunter and usually for hours before even being considered for a shortlist to a client. Psychometric assessments and other tests are normal in this type of recruitment. Holding hands by way of guidance and advice are part and parcel of real executive search.

Contingency then? It means that the recruiter can only invoice their client if one of their candidates is employed by the client. It's like real estate agents who only get commission if they close a deal so sell sell sell is the name of the game. The more resumes which go out to a client the better chance the contingency recruiter has to make money. A client is often using several

agencies so it's all fast moving and business is typically conducted over the telephone. The first recruiter who presents a box of resumes obviously has a better shot at landing a successful placement and getting paid. Need I say more?

Ask the recruiter about the next step should you both agree to move forward. If the recruiter wants to meet you first, that's a good sign, but there is a but. Ask where such meeting will take place since many smaller firms and even companies without license from Ministry of Labour tend to suggest meetings at coffee shops and hotel lobbies. Believe me, this is not serious and you don't want to sit in a public place talking about yourself, your career, achievements, compensation, private affairs and what have you.

If so far so good, ask the headhunter to email you the job specs and their contact details including web site so you can familiarise yourself with the recruitment firm. Ask them to include a paragraph in the email that they will never show your resume to anyone (ever) unless you have confirmed your acceptance case by case. Protect your resume and reputation as it was your social security number. Too many humbugs will broadcast your personal details unsolicited to make some quick money.

Finally, we headhunters love when you say: "Just a moment. Let me close my door."

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