

Three Big Questions when Selecting a Recruiter

By Bruce Dingman

Prospective clients often ask us a myriad of questions. Good questions. So we've gathered the top three and answered them here. First, they ask us...

“How expansive is your database?”

Finding candidates is a major part of the executive search process. At The Dingman Company we try hard to use multiple sources in order to locate the best candidates.

First, we determine where the candidates are likely to be. Oftentimes it involves buying an industrial directory or joining a professional association in order to get the membership directory. Plus we supplement those efforts with:

- Searching through our database of 40,000+ records identifying which people might have connections for our particular search
- Using appropriate job boards
- Sourcing off fellow recruiters (shhh! Some recruiters do helpful back scratching...but don't tell anyone)
- Original research in that industry or profession, which includes reading trade magazines to identify “grandfathers” (people in the profession who are highly networked and who might wish to be helpful)

We don't use newspaper ads, and only rarely use a generic job board like www.Monster.com, for both would generate tons of resumes with very few applicants worthy of serious consideration.

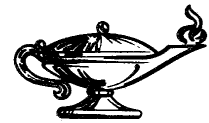
Example: For a recent VP-Human Resources in the hotel industry-a search that we expected to be difficult-we contacted 600 people as sources or potential candidates. By casting the net so broadly we ended up with eight great candidates, twice what we needed.

“How many searches like this have you done?”

Actually, this question isn't as relevant to the search process as some might think. Finding candidates or understanding the industry or the function isn't hard.

We often take on searches unlike anything we've ever done before. There have been some rather esoteric assignments over the years. Our founder, Bob Dingman, once found a chief dog-catcher (the real title was Director of Animal Control). We've also found a VP-New Product Development for a metallized window films company, a multi-plant manager for a steel pipe manufacturing company, and a unit general manager with a background in construction forensics. Finding candidates is not usually the hardest part; making the right match is.

Without a doubt, recent searches for a similar position often reveal candidates who were not right for one search but might be perfect for the next one. For recruiters who specialize in one niche,



their database may be all they rely on-choosing to do little if any original research for different clients. But we have found that over 90% of the time the selected candidate was found by research done specifically for that search, not from a resume database.

At The Dingman Company, we contact hundreds of people, even if we already know numerous candidates for the search. We don't think it's fair to the client, nor up to our best work, not to seek new candidates by casting the net broadly.

“How do you come to know if a candidate has the right personality, management style, values and fit with our organization and the job?”

This is the area of our greatest strength. The biggest reason new hires fail is because the employer didn't really understand who they were hiring. Usually after a few weeks traits appear in the employee that, had they been known a month before, the candidate never would have been asked to join the company. Knowing this, we strive to match the employer and candidate so completely that this situation is not a likelihood.

We like to compare what the recruiter's personal interview of the candidate reveals with what is learned by the numerous reference checks with the candidate's bosses, peers and subordinates. We ask many of the same questions of the references as we do of the candidate...to see if the responses line up. Questions include management style, personality, results achieved, character, and temperament. And in the personal interview with the candidate, we even delve into their upbringing-asking questions such as: “Since a person is to some degree a product of the family they came from, tell us about your father's career. Where did you grow up? How many siblings do you have? What was your personality like at age 12? What is it like now?”

Companies often complain that references tell them very little information about a candidate that's helpful. We hardly find that problem at all. Why? When a candidate is exceptional people talk freely (at least if we call the reference at home). If a candidate is only average, references are much more guarded. The phrase, “In the multitude of testimony there is truth” is almost always the case. So we check six, eight or even ten references. Naturally the person's situation can depend on how easily references can be checked for we never want to jeopardize the candidate's present position. As confidentiality allows, we ask references who else might prove insightful for us...thus reaching references not provided by the candidate. After the reference checking, if we haven't seen the heart and mind of the candidate, we are less certain we're recommending a winner. We couldn't be as confident in our results as we are if our due diligence wasn't as thorough as it is.

Select a recruiter with whom you will enjoy working and can trust. No matter how good the firm's pedigree, how appropriate their experience or how sterling their ethics, the individual consultant who will handle your search should also be one you want to work with. With many good recruiters available, you will be able to find one who fits your comfort zone.