

Appreciation and Expectations

I attended a Society for Information Management Meeting (SIM) last night. As is customary at these meetings, I saw some of our fellow TENG members at this one. Almost without exception, each of them thanked me for creating, growing and managing the TENG. These expressions of gratitude have become fairly typical for me at TENG and SIM meetings, yet I never fail to appreciate them. The countless Emails and phone calls from TENG and FENG (Financial Executives Network Group) members alike validate the concept and help to keep me going through these difficult times. During my many years in executive search and recruiting, I have always felt a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction whenever I have helped a client solve a difficult business problem. I have especially enjoyed helping people build their careers and improve their lifestyles. These feelings aside, managing the TENG has been the icing on the cake, because for the first time in my career, I feel that I am finally building something that is measurable and living. I am sure that all of you can relate to this because as Information Technology executives, you are builders in your own right. Indeed, had it not been for operating the TENG and receiving all your words of support shared in the face of your own challenges, I am not sure how well I would have endured this difficult economy, and I would not want to contemplate what my career would be like without it.

What drove me to create the TENG was a sense of frustration and helplessness caused by watching many of my clients and business contacts lose their livelihoods over the past two years. Last year, a search colleague who works in a non-IT discipline made me aware of the FENG and its model, and the rest is history, as they say. For the past ten months, I and more recently, some associates at Bruner Consulting, have worked diligently following the FENG model, to share every appropriate job lead, networking event, association meeting announcement and success story; as well as process new members, update contact information and handle special requests, all free of charge to you. Performing this outreach has been a labor of love. As builders of business solutions through technology, you know only too well that any effort requires people, technology and other resources to make it happen. As part of my spiritual life, I chair the Finance Committee for my church. That endeavor has taught me that all outreach must be financed. No matter how noble or worthy the cause, someone has to pay for it in cold, hard cash, or else it can't exist. Therein lies the focus of this newsletter.

I have publicized my secondary purpose for creating the TENG both via print, phone and personal conversations, not only to our members but also to a variety of business contacts. Everyone agrees that my model will work. The FENG and its ancillary Financial Executives Consulting Group are my proof of concept. A few outsiders have expressed surprise that the TENG does not charge membership dues, but I feel that I can't fulfill the outreach mission if I make people pay for it. Besides, there are plenty of pay services waiting for executives in transition and I didn't want the TENG to be another one. To achieve my secondary purpose, I am assuming that by operating the TENG, I am building a bond of mutual trust with each of you; essentially creating a brand for myself and Bruner Consulting and with that a desirable uniqueness that separates us from other practitioners in our industry. This would then make you seek to use our services for executive consulting and permanent search work. I have also stated that you are under no obligation to do so but that your business would be very much appreciated.

We are now experiencing the beginnings of having business come to Bruner Consulting from TENG members and find this encouraging. Nonetheless, the most troublesome part of managing the TENG is dealing with the numerous requests from members, as well as outsiders who expect me to hand them access to our member database to further their own commercial ventures without financial consideration to my company. When informed of my expectations, their reactions range from surprise to silence. I have no problem with Associate Members who state that corporate policy requires them to post their positions on the Web, that the CEO won't release funds for third party search firms, and the like. As a businessman, I understand this. Let's face it, when dealing with declining or flat sales, you must cut expenses, like it or not. But please understand, that the mission of Bruner Consulting includes operating profitably as well. It is unfair to expect us to give you the TENG database because your company cannot or will not pay for our services. As someone once said long ago, "there is no free lunch". If you won't pay for recruiting, then you must do the work yourself. I am puzzled however, because I am not sure if people are making requests for free use of the TENG database out of confusion about my purposes, ignorance or selfish arrogance. Essentially, people are saying to us, "We admire your work with the TENG, we want your database, but we don't want to pay for you". Sometimes, it is hard to perform an outreach and labor of love when others show a lack of respect and contempt for your work and the costs of doing it.

I would like to share with you some vignettes to illustrate my point:

- Recently, one of our members sent a brief Email stating that an unspecified company in the Northeast was seeking a CTO and Head of IT Security and furnished the name of a recruiter along with contact information. I replied via Email that releasing this lead would cause the recruiter to be inundated with resumes, mostly of non-fits and asked this CIO to try to obtain job specifications that would allow members to self-screen before applying. I then received an Email from this CIO's Human Resources Department saying that I should use this vague lead and that the recruiter would screen out the non-fits. I found it interesting that this CIO had revealed only accidentally and indirectly the fact that these leads were in their own staff and that they expected me to literally hand them the keys to the TENG database, because they would have received hundreds of responses, which would have made their recruiter's life easier. Moreover, this was in violation of my second purpose, that Associate TENG Members hiring for their own companies, must expect to pay for search or consulting services in order to hire Active TENG members. Perhaps this CIO thought that they would be helping other members, but a little common sense would indicate that at some point someone has to be compensated for creating and managing the TENG.
- A business contact of many years sought free use of the TENG database to fill senior executive positions in his company. Now that I have refused him this access, he refuses to take my calls.
- My newsletters are shared with the FENG and if TENG succeeds, it will be in no small part due to the support of our CFO counterparts. Nevertheless, earlier this summer, a FENG member who is the CFO of an entrepreneurial firm, sent me Emails indicating that he urgently needed to hire an IT Director and asked for use of the TENG database. I responded that I would be pleased to provide this, but only as a search executed through my company. He refused to pay a retainer and was reluctant to meet with me to discuss his opportunity. His urgency seemed to wane and he then referred me to his Human Resources department. I asked him if he was the decision

maker and the hiring official. He replied in the affirmative, but then said someone else was performing the interviews, that HR was coordinating the effort and that he would only see the finalist(s). He would not answer qualitative questions critical to the success of the search. Neither would HR. Further calls to this company have gone unanswered.

- The CEO of a fledgling company contacted me via Email, as Chairman of the TENG specifically to ask my help in filling his need for a CTO. His venture had just received funding and was targeting an IPO in 4 years at a valuation of \$80 MM. I replied via Email letter that I would be pleased to help him either via a retained search or through a contracted interim CTO. He never replied.
- Some other recently hired TENG members have registered surprise and disappointment when I have refused them free access to the database, while others are trying to exploit or leverage the TENG name for personal gain without thought of financial consideration to my company.
- Last spring, a former TENG member in transition, decided to open an executive search practice and secretly contacted all the direct company job leads to build her book of business.

The list would be endless. Suffice to say, some days spent managing the TENG remind me of snorkeling among sharks off the coast of Mexico many years ago.

We are all well-educated business people who should understand that there must be a “quid pro quo”. The TENG is rapidly approaching 600 members. It will never achieve the stature, success and permanence of the FENG unless it generates revenue. Each attempt by someone to either overtly or covertly avoid paying to use the database via our services will be another impediment to our long-term success. I can’t live on words of appreciation alone. I am pleased to add value to your careers by sharing leads and offering career advice; but understand that if you wish to use the TENG membership database to hire permanent help or consultants, or to gain financially, you must be willing to pay for it.

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