

Hiring Psychology and Why We Share, Revisited

Some thoughts contained in this newsletter were expressed in another from early 2002. The TENG has grown considerably since then making this topic timeless and always critical to our overall success.

During my career in executive search, I have heard the comment, “second is always last”. Another version of this is that every candidate on the slate for a specific job, who is not hired, comes in second. As people recount their interview experiences, I will hear vignettes similar to these, “I came in second for the Director’s job at XYZ,” or “I had a great interview with the company and they sounded like they would be calling with an offer, but I haven’t heard from them in a month”. Probably these words, or some version of them, have been uttered by nearly every job candidate at some time or other. Of the hundreds of searches I have executed in the past 27 years, I can count on my hands the times when the client’s “anointed” candidate did not accept an offer, or the deal fell through for any number of reasons, that a number two was taken. I have several fingers left over. Typically in any search, one person emerges as the chosen one. When the hire cannot be consummated with this person, the client almost inevitably states, “Show us more candidates”. When pushed to reconsider those already seen, they usually decline, offering what they feel are weaknesses in those individuals who remain in the pool. This reaction is nothing more than the client’s expression of disappointment and the search has to be restarted as if new. Valid or not, that’s the way it is. Exceptions do occur. One of our members in the Philadelphia area can attest to it. He was the “number two” in a CIO search last year and he gracefully accepted rejection as his competitor was hired. His behavior made a lasting impression upon the company’s senior management. When the person hired originally left after nine months, the company offered our member the position.

The hiring “dance” or process, especially at the senior executive level, is based heavily upon the chemistry of the moment, or whatever makes two people “click”. Frequently it is referred to as a marriage, which is a very apt metaphor. I could recount many stories where people were hired, not for being the best qualified candidate, but because they connected with the hiring executive on a personal and professional level. Nowadays, while being more than an exact fit is critical, the “soft skills” are equally so.

Knowing this, it simply means that one person will stand out from the pack and get the offer, whether they were seen early in the search or late. All you can do as a candidate is prepare for an interview do your best to sell yourself and move on. If you get an offer, you can celebrate.

The purpose of The TENG and what makes it work is when our ACTIVE members share job leads on an as-found basis. The Associate members are not interviewing and unless a

lead is handed to them from a colleague, they won't be sharing. If you wait for your candidacy to end before sharing a lead, chances are the job will be filled or out on offer to someone else. By not sharing a lead immediately, you will be doing your friends a disservice by wasting their time on a dead opportunity. While they won't say it, they may see you as lacking confidence and not being a team player. Hand out more than one or two dead leads and this reputation will stick. You will be paid back in kind. To put it bluntly, you have to give in order to get. Each of us has the power to create a chain reaction of giving by setting a positive example. I created this group to operate much like The Financial Executives Network Group, (FENG www.thefeng.org), with the blessing and counsel of Matt Bud, its Chairman. Matt has grown his group from 35 members in 1997 to a global networking powerhouse of over 14,000 today, and he did it based on this very same philosophy. In his words, "Time is the enemy. The value of any lead is its freshness. Someone will be hired for every job you explore. If it can't be you, it might as well be one of your friends, rather than someone you don't know." This means that you personally introduce a fellow TENG member (this can be done through a conference call) to either the search consultant or the company, telling them that they should consider this person as a candidate. This elevates you in everyone's eyes, because your self-confidence, selflessness and faith in your own abilities have been showcased. If your friend gets hired, s/he owes you a tremendous debt and will do everything they can think of to help you in return. You now have an excellent industry contact.

You can take this to a higher level if you are pending against an opportunity via a recruiting firm. Offer to introduce qualified colleagues, but pre-screen them for the recruiter. A few of our members have posted leads to the LeadShare Group and are serving as the "point person" to review all potential candidates for appropriate fit, forwarding only the select few best qualified to the search firm. Members who do this are building relationships with recruiter, which they hope to leverage in the future. It also protects confidential searches and prevents the recruiter from being bombarded by resumes of non-fits. This encourages the recruiter to circulate other leads through the TENG.

Some of our chapters have taken sharing to heart and others have not. Our more "open" chapters not only share job leads on a timely, as found basis, but they have also created a mutually supportive, caring environment, that encourages members to connect and help each other on a personal, as well as professional level. Meeting attendance and member participation are very high. Meetings run overtime and members leave knowing they have received valuable shared information and peer support. Yet other chapters report having difficulty breaking through the barriers of suspicion and lack of trust and are generally unable to share any meaningful leads. Their chapter meetings are not as well attended and participation is lackluster. In our present slow market, members in these chapters are hoarding and jealously guarding any job leads to minimize competition. The truth is that this information always gets out regardless and there are always competing candidates. The hiring companies are also networking through vendors, industry contacts and customers to find the best hire. The people whom you don't want to compete against you are going to find the lead you are concealing whether you want them to or not. If you befriend them and share with them on a timely basis, your stature can only improve. The

idea behind the FENG and TENG approach is that you refer your friends and colleagues as your competition. When this level of sharing is achieved, members work from a deeper trust and begin to share all kinds of leads and business intelligence that would otherwise never be revealed. For the most part, trust begets trust and people will bend over backward to help those who have voluntarily helped them. It's like playing dominoes. Do you want to be the one that starts the chain reaction or the last one to be hit with the lead?

Also remember that I distribute the job leads to you, the membership. I can't prevent you from forwarding a lead to a non-member, but it is TENG policy for them to be shared by members only. If you receive a lead that fits a colleague who is not a TENG member, nominate her or him for Active or Associate membership, as appropriate. I will act quickly to include them and generally turn around most requests in a week. They will then be able to access the lead at the LeadShare Group. By sharing with non-members, you have no control over who will ultimately see the lead and may inadvertently help some complete stranger land a position. I can't determine whether you will commit to this approach, nor can I control your performance. That is totally up to you.

I am serious and committed to growing The TENG to be a valuable and useful career service for senior IT executives. You have been kind and generous in your support, referrals and comments. Please keep the new members and job leads coming.
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