

Three Thoughts On

Connecting the objectives of candidates,
companies and recruiters

By Cheryl Bedard

The
McCormick
Group[®]
Inc.
Executive Search Consulting

THREE THOUGHTS

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Foreword by Ann-Marie Johnson

Searching for a job can seem as dreadful as a root canal. Searching for a great employee and convincing them to accept your opportunity is the other side of the same miserable coin. Yet most of us will be on one or both sides many times throughout our careers. Job hunters and hiring managers alike would benefit by engaging more effectively in the hiring process.

Three Thoughts offers distilled and actionable strategies to do so. These insights flow generously with wit, wisdom, and humor from Cheryl Bedard. Ms. Bedard matches talented executives with deserving companies as a recruiter with The McCormick Group, a Forbes Best-listed executive search firm.

Three Thoughts draws deeply from her experience connecting the best people with jobs at the best companies with the best bosses. The magic is simple. Each chapter focuses on a specific facet of the hiring process and provides three key thoughts that are essential for success.

Good Better Best

Never let it rest

Until good becomes better

And better becomes best

Cheryl's first grade teacher, Ms. White, inspired her with this rhyme. It captures Cheryl's mindset when connecting people with opportunities, and is a recurring theme throughout this book for candidates and employers to go the extra step.

Whether you are seeking your next career move or to hire a key employee for your organization, **Three Thoughts** will accelerate your progress toward becoming your best and achieving success.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4** Employee Attributes All Companies Want to Hire
- 6** Connecting Your Experience to a Company's Needs
- 7** Measuring Your Value
- 9** Resumes: Good, Better and Best
- 11** Acing the Interview
- 13** Facing Adverse Information About Yourself
- 16** How Planning a Job Search is Like Planning a Vacation
- 19** What to Do When the Answer is NO
- 22** Delivering News When the Answer is NO
- 25** Preparing Your References to Help You Get the Job
- 28** Counteroffers
- 31** Resumes - Would You Call You?
- 34** Search Committees: Avoiding the Split Decision
- 38** Search Committees: Trick or Treat
- 42** Giving Thanks



THREE THOUGHTS ON Employee Attributes All Companies Want to Hire

What attributes do companies want in their employees? The answer doesn't vary by industry or type of role. Employers want to hire people who are:

1. Smart
2. Practical problem solver
3. Kind to others

Here are tangible indicators for each characteristic:

Smart people:

- Apply their training and education
- Learn from their mistakes
- Anticipate and plan for important actions

Practical problem solvers:

- Accept reality and deal with actual circumstances
- Solve problems instead of ignoring or delaying them
- Deliver measurable value compared to resources invested

Kind to others:

- Share credit and give praise
- Show compassion
- Are honest and admit their own mistakes

Writing an effective resume and conducting a winning interview is the art of making a connection and delivering a consistent message that matters to the decision-makers.

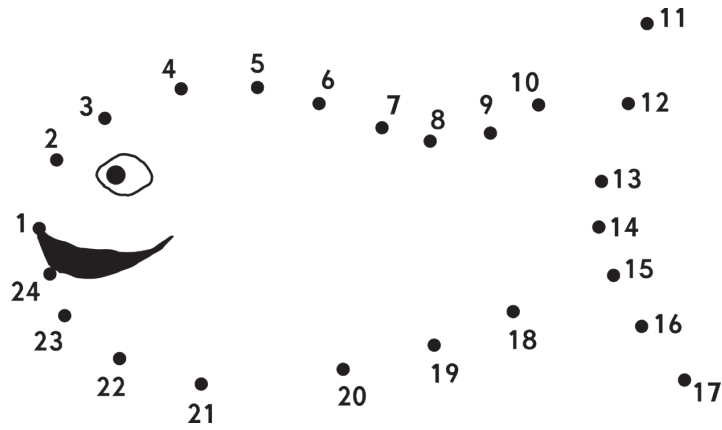
How does your story show that you are smart, a practical problem solver, and kind to others?

How does your story show that you are smart, a practical problem solver, and kind to others? What evidence can you offer based on your prior training and work experience?

How can you communicate those are consistent traits you will bring and apply to benefit the employer? What are your best life anecdotes that show the best of those traits in you?

The best companies and the best leaders want smart, practical problem solvers who are kind to others. Whether on your resume or in an interview, you must convey your story to demonstrate you possess and consistently deliver results through these attributes. Tie it all back to how

hiring you would be to their benefit. That will go a long way to connect you as the valuable solution to their urgent problem, which is the key to landing your desired role.



THREE THOUGHTS ON Connecting Your Experience to a Company's Needs

1: Connect the Dots

- **Do:** You have to connect the dots. You must draw the clear parallels between your prior experiences and your ability to do the job at hand. You must explain the benefits you will bring.
- **Don't:** Think they get the connection on their own. You must put your experiences in context, so they understand why they should care and how it will benefit them.

2: Show Energy, Confidence and Honesty

- **Do:** Tell them what you're excited about doing for them. Tell them what you already know you can do. Be honest about what you haven't done previously and tell them why you are capable and excited to learn new skills.
- **Don't:** Express desperation, arrogance, or misstate the truth.

**Express your value.
First, explain why
they benefit from
choosing you.**

3: Express Your Value

- **Do:** Express your value. First, explain why they benefit from choosing you. Then, explain your compensation desires in terms of fairness based on the expected return on their investment.
- **Don't:** Expect to receive above average compensation for delivering an average return on their investment.

Once you've done your homework and you know what the company and business unit you desire to join are trying to deliver, you have to explain how your boss, the business unit and the company will benefit from accessing your skills and experiences. It's shortsighted to expect the hiring company will inherently understand how they will benefit from hiring you. You must tell them and make the connection.



THREE THOUGHTS ON Measuring Your Value

It is very important to identify and measure the value you deliver. Fair compensation is proportionate to measurable and desirable results. On your resume, during the interview and while negotiating compensation, you should be able to describe the benefits you will deliver and express the value. Here are three ways to measure your value:

1. Financial Impact – Show Me the Money!

**We keep score in
the game of business
with money. Know
your score.**

We keep score in the game of business with money. Know your score. You can deliver financially measurable results by:

- Increasing revenue
- Increasing profitability
- Decreasing costs and avoiding costs
- ROI – return on investment
- Saving time and increasing productivity

2. Subject Matter – What Do You Know?

You can deliver value based on what you know:

- A subject or topic
- A specific technical skill
- A market (vertical or segment)
- A strategy
- A way to get something done



3. Make People Happy – Who Do You Serve?

Your value can be expressed in terms of how happy other people are about being served by or working with you.

- Customer service
- Client service
- Community service
- Peers, subordinates, employees, teammates
- The Boss

Show how what you know how to do or what you know a lot about benefits your company, clients, colleagues and customers.

If you can describe the value you bring, you can better justify increased compensation. Write down the numbers. Show how you help the company make more money, be more profitable, or be a good custodian of a non-profit or public entity's money. Show how the time you save and increased productivity benefit the company and customers and help it grow.

Show how what you know how to do or what you know a lot about benefits your company, clients, colleagues and customers.

Describe how you make people happy. How is your service rated? How happy is the customer? How do your colleagues benefit from the work you do each day? How will the community be positively impacted?

Most importantly, how will you make your boss happy? Remember, your boss will decide if you get hired or get promoted and will influence the compensation you are offered. Remind them of how happy they will be once you are on their team.



THREE THOUGHTS ON Resumes: Good, Better and Best

Good Better Best
Never let it rest
Until good becomes better
And better becomes best

I learned that rhyme in first grade from my teacher, Miss White. I think of it often as I work with candidates and clients. In my nineteen year career as a recruiter, no client has ever asked me to find them a good (or average) candidate. No executive has ever asked me to identify a job for them at good (or average) company. Everyone asks for something better, if not the best.

Better (and the best) companies can describe the mission and vision for the company. They know where they are going and how they intend to get there. Better (and the best) candidates can describe their personal mission. They know how they want to apply their talents. They know what they want to accomplish through their work. They know how to describe their past accomplishments in ways that inspire believe in what they may deliver in the future.

Think of this concept as you construct your resume.

I. Good Resumes

Good resumes tell us where you've been. Good resumes describe responsibilities. Glancing at a good resume, the reader knows what tasks the candidate has been responsible for. Good resumes describe the employment history and education of the candidate. Good resumes are often interchangeable, meaning the last person to hold a job has a resume that is very similar to the current person holding the job. It can be hard to tell the difference between the worst performer in the position versus the better performer, because their resumes say essentially the same thing. Sample bullet points from good resumes:

- Responsible for financial management and analysis
- Responsible for sales and business development in federal market
- Responsible for recruitment and talent acquisition

2. Better Resumes

Better resumes tell us where you are. Better resumes describe accomplishments. After reviewing a better resume, the reader knows what tasks the candidate has completed. Better resumes describe the candidate's role and indicate some of the impact of the candidate's work. Better resumes are often written from the perspective of the candidate's position downward in the organization, but often ignore the impact the candidate has at their peer level and on senior executives. Better resumes help distinguish the better candidate from the good (or average) candidates. Here are the same three sample bullet points as they would read on better resumes:

- Provided financial management and analysis to senior leadership leading to improved profitability
- Leadership of business development team resulting in increased sales in federal market
- Recruited 30 new people to fill important IT support roles

3. The Best Resumes

The best resumes describe where you are going, by describing why you matter. The best resumes emphasize your value to the company, its customers, your team, your peers and your boss. The best resumes describe what you did, why it matters, to whom it matters and articulates the monetary value of your accomplishments. The best resumes show how you influence decisions. The best resumes reflect the impact of your work. The best resumes make clear why it matters that you were in the role. The best resumes set you apart. The best resumes remind the reader that you are an above average performer. The best resumes attract and inspire the best bosses and the best companies to want you on their team. Finally, here are the sample bullet points as written on the best resumes:

Your best resume will show why investing in your talent is a great option for the best companies.

- Analyzed client travel expenses, made improvements in planning trips, resulting in streamlined travel planning process benefiting executives and administrative assistants, and a 10% decrease in travel expenses, saving \$1 million annually
- Refocused efforts of business development team, improved proposal processes, delivered \$10 million in new revenue in one year and a \$50 million pipeline, allowing executive management team to meet strategic growth goals
- Revamped recruitment process for IT support staff, reduced time to fill jobs from 40 days to 14 days, and improved IT support response time from 10 hours to 30 minutes resulting in 50% increase in employee satisfaction scores regarding IT support

Does your good resume identify you as a merely average candidate? Does it compel the best companies to focus on recruiting you? If not, you need to make it better. Does your better resume show a potential employer how you have delivered improved results? If so, you can still make it the best resume. Your best resume will show why investing in your talent is a great option for the best companies. Your demonstrated record for delivering results, especially financially measurable results, will inspire the best companies and the best bosses to compete for you.



THREE THOUGHTS ON Acing the Interview

The point of an interview is to convey why you are the best candidate. The interview should be a confirmation of the impression the employer got when they reviewed your resume. The interview should fill in the blanks and reaffirm the reasons the employer found your background interesting. The conversation should help the interviewer imagine you successfully doing the job. While not comprehensive, here are three thoughts on acing the interview.

I. Know Yourself

The first rule of interviewing is questions about you shouldn't stump you. You should be prepared to answer the most basic and predictable questions during an interview. Here are some questions frequently asked in interviews:

- Tell me about yourself. An effective response is a 90 second to 2 minute summary explaining who you are as a professional and giving a little insight into your personality.
- Describe your career transitions. You should have a concise, precise story that explains your career moves in a positive fashion. Always avoiding blaming anyone else for outcomes.

Describe the measurable accomplishments you have achieved. Specify the monetary value of your work where possible.

- Describe your leadership/management style. Even if you are not in a management role, you should be able to describe your style as a teammate, collaborator or supporter of your leadership team.

2. Sell Yourself

The second rule of interviewing is to listen to the questions they ask you and answer them. While doing so, you should clearly state the benefits of choosing you. Have a few anecdotes prepared that expound on your past successes and provide a few more details and context than your resume does.



- Answer questions about your effectiveness in previous roles by describing what you did, why it was important and how your boss and company benefited from the results of your actions.
- Recount what has improved under your leadership. Describe the measurable accomplishments you have achieved. Specify the monetary value of your work where possible.
- Illustrate the problems you have solved, or better yet, the problems you have prevented. Outline the parallels between prior work situations and what you might predictably encounter in the new role.

3. Be Yourself

The third rule of interviewing is to be personable and show the best aspects of your personality. The employer will choose you not just because of what you can do, but also because of who they think you are. You want to be chosen because you'll fit in with the team. That is not to say you must be exactly like them to fit in. It means the company will understand the advantages they will gain from your diverse experiences and perspective.

- Illustrate why you are successful in your work by connecting your best personality traits to your ability to deliver desired outcomes.

The first interview belongs to the employer. If they don't learn what they need to know about you in the first interview, they are unlikely to invite you to a second one.

- Answer honestly about your weaknesses, while explaining why your weakness is not a permanent impediment. Point out how you have grown and learned from prior experiences, including adverse ones. Have a brief story prepared that describes a failure and the lessons learned, but only bring it up if asked.
- Connect your personal values and mission to the values and mission of the employer. Explain why your work matters to you.

The first interview belongs to the employer. If they don't learn what they need to know about you in the first interview, they are unlikely to invite you to a second one. Have questions about the company and the role prepared, but remember you don't have to learn everything you'd like to know in the first conversation. At this stage it is more important not to leave their questions unanswered.

If you know yourself, sell yourself and can be yourself, you'll perform well in a first interview and be strongly considered for a second round of meetings.



THREE THOUGHTS ON Facing Adverse Information About Yourself

No one is perfect. Most of us have a blemish in our background. I've worked with candidates with a variety of blemishes. From poor job performance to bankruptcy to being fired to being arrested, I've spoken with many candidates with stories to tell. Some negative information can be easily handled. Other issues are more difficult to overcome. Often, the outcome is affected by the situation under which the information is discovered and the timing with which it is disclosed. As a candidate, the questions are which blemishes need to be confessed to the recruiter and employer; and when do they need to be revealed?

In the situations where I've been involved, how much of an impediment the adverse information turned out to be depended mostly on timing. Surprises in the recruiting process are seldom appreciated by the recruiter or the employer. As a recruiter, I prefer to have any and all adverse information shared with me as early as possible in the process, so the candidate and I can strategize on the best way and best time to tell the employer. No reputable recruiter will help a candidate conceal information that would impact a client's decision. However, most recruiters will help a candidate put the adverse information in context, and emphasize other strong points to balance the information out.

The effectiveness of the explanation depends greatly on what the information is compared to what the job is. Employers are less likely to consider a candidate with baggage when they are paying a recruiter, but depending on the issue, they may look past it. When self-represented, candidates should plan carefully to decide what to tell the employer and when. Part of deciding what to share with the employer depends on the role, responsibilities and on how the company will find the adverse information.

Here are three thoughts on dealing with detrimental information about you.

As a recruiter, I prefer to have any and all adverse information shared with me as early as possible in the process, so the candidate and I can strategize on the best way and best time to tell the employer.

I. Personal Information

I was once discussing a potential search with a client. They had identified one candidate on their own. While excited to meet the person, the client commented, "I hope he's not the shirtless guy we found on the internet." Negative personal information is the easiest to counter because it's mostly avoidable. Unfavorable personal information should be revealed when the process reaches the stage that the company is asking for additional information. If they ask permission to do a background check, tell them what they will find before they find it.

- Online – clean up your online presence. Google yourself. Know what surfaces, especially if it is information about someone else with the same name. Pay attention to photos you are tagged in. Let your friends and family know you'd appreciate not having embarrassing photos posted publicly (and keep in mind few private postings remain private.) Avoid posting about topics your employer may not like being associated with.
- Education Verification – degree verification is almost always done because it is easy and inexpensive for employers to verify degrees. Do not embellish your education. If you've done it successfully in the past, stop, because at some point the truth will surface. I've seen several examples of a candidate falsely claiming a degree that was not required to get the job, but telling the truth was. Lies cause offers to be withdrawn and taint reputations unnecessarily.
- Credit Check – most info that surfaces during a credit check can be successfully explained. Know what your report will show. Have countering details prepared to put the information in context. Many people have experienced credit issues or bankruptcy after health problems, divorce or unsuccessful businesses. Be prepared to explain what happened and what you did to remedy the situation. For some jobs, adverse financial information will not be easily overlooked, especially if the job involves handling money.
- Criminal Check – facts matter. Give the company the facts about the reason you were ticketed or arrested and the resolution of the case. Some cases will be overlooked. A past DUI may not keep you from getting a job as an accountant, but an embezzlement charge might.
- Drug Tests – if you will not successfully pass a drug screening, don't put yourself in a situation where you have to take one. Once you fail, the company is unlikely to hire you for any role at all. Do not rely on explaining a failed drug test after the fact. If any prescribed medication would be flagged, get a letter from your doctor and submit it to the HR department and the testing facility ahead of time. The legal status of cannabis in a state does not eliminate a company's ability to prohibit cannabis use.

2. Job Performance Information

Unfavorable information about your job performance or the circumstances of your departure usually comes from references or former coworkers or supervisors, and you won't always know that the recruiter or employer has received that information. Know what people are likely to say about you. Be honest about your job performance. If you mishandled something, own it and explain it. Job performance information should be shared when the interview discussion focuses on your performance.



- Why did the failure happen? Lack of planning, lack of resources, poor timing, poor execution or changing market conditions can all lead to project failures. Explain what you learned from the experience and how you will avoid repeating the mistake. Family emergencies or personal health crises can also impede performance. Explain what happened and show why you don't expect the same issue to surface again.

- Verifiable versus rumored information – documentation matters. If you have documented evidence of your employer's expectations versus your actual performance, share it. Especially in sales or business development, you can often show your annual goals compared to actual performance and pipeline development. Make sure you redact any confidential or proprietary information before sharing outside of your company.

- Philosophical differences – sometimes business leaders disagree on what strategy to pursue. Those discussions can be arduous and may lead to managers or leaders leaving the company. An unemotional explanation is the best course. Make a supportive statement if you can. "The CEO deserves a team wholly dedicated to executing her strategies. I couldn't fully support her, so I left to make room for a Vice President who could."

**An unemotional
explanation is
the best course.**

3. Current or Prior Employer Information

Sometimes, adverse information is really about the company, not the employee. A company (or your boss) may have been investigated, debarred, fined or prosecuted. The events leading up to the action may have occurred prior or subsequent to your employment, or you have not have been in a position to know about it while it was happening. Try to collect the actual facts about what happened, especially explanations offered by your employer, so the recruiter and future employer won't have to rely solely on news reports to dissect the details. Information on your current or prior employer should be shared as the conversation warrants, especially when discussing why you left (or want to leave.)

- Be honest about what you knew and when you knew it. Own your part of the problem.
- Document any actions you took (such as, I called the FBI and the SEC and then I quit on the spot.)
- Explain what you learned and how you'll help a future employer avoid similar problems.

Unfavorable information will surface. Be prepared to separate fact from fiction. Own your actions and take responsibility for your decisions. Be honest with your recruiter and potential employer. Give them reasons to evaluate your actions favorably. Look in the mirror and recognize your own blemishes. Remember them when you are in the position to be gracious to another person and give them a second chance if you can.



THREE THOUGHTS ON How Planning a Job Search is Like Planning a Vacation

Candidates contact me daily for help in finding a new job. As a recruiter, speaking with candidates ready for new opportunities is exciting. Yet that excitement often fades quickly, as I realize the candidate is nowhere near ready to consider new options.

How do I know? Because the candidate can't answer basic questions about their future desires.

What do you want to get out of your next opportunity that you don't have now?

What is your ultimate career goal?

What do you need to learn or experience to position yourself to be competitive for your peak career position?

If you could fix what is making you unhappy or frustrated at your job today, would you stay?

Have a sense of what you are looking for before you start to look, and especially before you ask others to help.

What have you learned about your current company and role that you wish you had recognized before you accepted the job?

Thinking back to when you interviewed for the role, if you knew then what you know now, would you have taken the position?

Whether working with a recruiter, working your network or looking on your own, your search will be more fruitful if you have a sense of what you are looking for before you start to look, and especially before you ask others to help.

Planning a job search is a lot like planning a vacation. As much fun as unlimited time, money and destination choices sounds, most of us would never leave our couches if we had infinite options because we would never be able to make a decision. Starting a job search without a clear focus may find you actively looking, but it is hard to find what you're looking for when you don't know what you seek. It is especially hard for others to

help you when you can't describe what you want. The best answer to "What are you looking for?" is not "Here's what I don't want." You need to know what you DO want.

Here are three thoughts on planning a job search like planning a vacation.

I. Destination

Where do you want to go? Deciding you want to be near water still leaves the options of the ocean, the lake or the pool. There are many different ways to describe how your next company could be different from your current company. Size, stage of development, market share, reputation, innovative or traditional, ownership structure and mission are all differentiators. Which matters most to you in your new company? Prioritize the differences you most desire to see.

What do you want to do when you get there? You can't waterski in a pool, so if waterskiing is important on your vacation, then you're heading to the lake. You can't surf on the lake, so if you must surf, you're heading to the ocean. What you really want to do helps define the choices of where you can do it.

What do you want to be held accountable for in your next role? What are the top three things you want your boss to count on you to do or deliver? How do you want your contributions to the company to be measured and valued?

What do you want to spend? Wait a minute, you just thought. I don't want to spend anything to get a new job. In fact, I want increased compensation. Most of us automatically assume a new role will come with increased compensation. But if your purpose in pursuing a new opportunity is to increase your satisfaction with your job, be open to the possibility that increased compensation may not be the highest priority.

If the Rolling Stones ask me to sing backup for a show, I'll do it for free. If they ask me to join a tour, I'll need some compensation to cover expenses. If they ask me to join the band permanently, then I'll need to be paid fairly compared to other members of the band.

Different situations can command different compensation solutions. Be reasonable in your compensation expectations compared to the reality of the situation you seek. The greatest cost to candidates in a job search is the risk of your search being revealed to your current employer. Think carefully of this risk as you decide how to conduct your search and who will be helping you.

2. Mode of Travel and Travel Companions

Now that you've decided on a destination, how do you plan to get there? Plane, train or automobile? Recruiters, referrals and/or direct applications? If your search must be absolutely confidential, then a recruiter may be a great option. If your search needs to be quiet, you may be able to engage your network after swearing them to secrecy. If confidentiality is not an overriding concern, then openly using your network, LinkedIn and job boards and direct applications may be the most effective strategy.



Who will travel with you? Travel companions include your most trusted advisers (spouse, mentors, family and friends), your recruiter, your references, your network, or even your boss and colleagues, if your search is open. Be thoughtful about who you engage for advice in your search. Not everyone's opinion should be equally considered. For instance, don't let your friend who hates the beach talk you out of your surfing vacation when they aren't even going to be traveling with you.

3. Making the Final Decision

Decide how you will decide before it's time to decide. Ideally, determine what you will say yes to before you start to search. If you can't decide on a vacation destination, the travel agent will not present vacation packages. If your

If you are perpetually stuck on “I don't know” or “maybe,” people will stop asking.

answer to recruiters and your network is always, “I don't know if that interests me,” they will stop presenting options. No is a perfectly good answer. If an opportunity doesn't interest you, say so, and tell the source why, so they will know how to better filter options in the future. No one is offended when you say no. But if you are perpetually stuck on “I don't know” or “maybe,” people will stop asking.

Make a decision tree. Go back to the top three priorities you identified when you started the search. If the new opportunity addresses those priorities, comes with fair compensation and you like the people, why wouldn't you say yes?

When your priorities are clear, you can weigh information and options objectively. You can clearly see where situations align with your preferences and where they do not. You can make an informed decision based on the reality you face.

Depending on where you are in your career, you are making a decision about the next three to ten years of your life. While that sounds like a long commitment, remember you can start planning your next trip to the mountains while you are lounging on the beach.



THREE THOUGHTS ON What to Do When the Answer is NO

The highest point during the hiring process for the recruiter, and even more so for the candidate, is the “Congratulations, you got the job!” call.

The lowest point is the call to give bad news. “You didn't get the job” is hard to say and harder to hear.

How you handle the answer NO is very important. It can determine whether or not the recruiter or employer will consider you in the future.

Here are three thoughts on what to do when the answer is NO.

I. Be Gracious and Accept the Answer

I presented a senior level federal government official on a search I was conducting. The client's feedback was they liked the candidate as a person, but didn't think he'd be a good fit for the role. I shared the feedback with the candidate two hours after his interview concluded.

The next morning, the candidate called and began yelling at me. He told me my client was wrong, adding that he was a perfect fit for the job. He said, “You need to call your client and tell him he's wrong.” I calmly assured him that I would not, and told him this behavior was inappropriate and unlikely to be helpful in his job search. I hung up knowing I would not represent him again.

While most of us over the age of 12 would have handled that situation better, we can all pay more attention to how we handle the answer NO. Make certain you aren't unintentionally making the bearer of bad news even more uncomfortable, as they will then be unlikely to actively engage with you in the future.

Let your grace be one of the things the employer remembers the most about you.

Recruiters tend to be more practiced in delivering the answer NO, and more forgiving of the emotional reaction some candidates have, but the more upbeat and professional you can be in the moment, the more long term benefits you will reap. Make it easy and comfortable for the recruiter to maintain a relationship with you so they will approach you with other opportunities.

Let your grace be one of the things the employer remembers the most about you.

2. Follow Up with a Thank You Note and an Offer to Help

It probably seems counter-intuitive to send a thank you note after you've been denied the job, and even more so to offer to help.

Do it.

It's the perfect way to continue the relationship with the employer or recruiter. Even though you sent a thank you note after your interview, a final note at the end of the process is still a smart thing to do.

Express your pleasure in meeting the person, restate your positive impression and continued interest in the company, and offer to help. During the interview, you learned information about pain points the company and the hiring authority need to solve. Offer any relevant help you can (a referral to a source, an article or book you've read, even a referral to a different candidate.)

Connect on LinkedIn. Establish a mutually-beneficial business relationship and maintain it with a light touch. You don't want to seem overbearing or stalker-ish.

3. Learn Something

Two weeks after the NO is received, you can contact the recruiter or hiring authority and ask if they have any advice or constructive criticism for you about your interviewing style.

This is not the same as asking why you weren't chosen.

A recruiter may offer some insights into additional experience you may want to gain to be a more competitive candidate in the future. However, asking the employer why you weren't picked is likely to shut down any future conversation. Employers avoid answering that question to avoid an uncomfortable conversation or the possibility of being sued.

State your interest in always learning how to be better and your appreciation for their expert opinion. This is a great time to remind the recruiter or decision maker of your continued interest. "Ms. Jones, I certainly hope your choice works out, but if some reason it doesn't, I would welcome the opportunity to be reconsidered." Then leave



it alone. Maintain regular contact with the recruiter. Pay attention to news about the company. Maintain your light and appropriate contact with the hiring authority.

Don't let your response to NO ruin your chance to get a second opportunity. Candidates who graciously accept the answer NO are more likely to be referred to other decision makers.

Sometimes the answer NO represents a swinging door; not a closed door:

Let your graciousness be the reason people want to go the extra mile to help you. Whatever you do, don't yell at the recruiter.





THREE THOUGHTS ON Delivering News When the Answer is NO

Candidates often comment to me about their experiences interviewing for jobs. I hear more disappointment expressed about how a company communicates with them during the process than about the final decision being NO. Candidates can handle the answer NO when it is delivered in a timely, respectful way. Too many companies work really hard to recruit talented candidates and then fail to communicate effectively throughout the process.

Candidates know they are competing with other candidates for the job. They know they aren't always going to get the job. Even when candidates are disappointed in the outcome, they don't have to be disappointed by the process. A company's reputation among the talent pool is not solely built by how they handle the people they hire. The people a company doesn't hire also contribute comments to the talent market about their interviewing experience.

In the worst situations, the company never clearly tells the candidate NO. The company just stops communicating with the candidate.

In the words of Maya Angelou, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Here are three thoughts on delivering the news when the answer is NO.

I. When to Tell the Candidate NO

The best time to tell a candidate the answer is NO is as soon as the employer knows. Most delayed responses are not due to a company's reluctance to deliver the news. The delayed responses are due to the company's failure to make a decision. Failure to make a decision is usually because the decision makers lacked a clear process to follow to arrive at a decision.

Even when candidates are disappointed in the outcome, they don't have to be disappointed by the process.

MAYBE is an easy out from making a decision. Employers sometimes decide to “keep a candidate warm,” asking the recruiter or the candidate to wait on a decision, without providing information about what the employer is waiting for.

Sometimes, the wait is valid. Waiting for the completion of the process of interviewing the candidate pool is a valid reason for asking a candidate to wait. However, at every step of the process, the decision makers can ask a few important questions to help determine if it is time to tell the candidate NO.

- Is this candidate someone we could see hiring for this role?
- If we don't meet anyone else, would we hire this person for this role?
- If our preferred candidate declines, would we hire this person for this role?

If the answer to any of those questions is NO, then it is time to tell the candidate NO. If the decision maker asks to “keep the candidate warm” while a fresh pool of candidates is recruited, then it is time to tell the candidate NO. If there is a need to see a new pool of candidates, then the employer is clearly not confident about committing to the person, and that person should be told NO.

If the answer to any of those questions is NO, then it is time to tell the candidate NO.

I've had clients ask me to delay conveying a NO to a candidate because the employer thinks they may change their mind and decide to hire the person. Delivering a timely, dignified NO actually increases the chances of recruiting that candidate in the future and of getting referrals to other talented people. A company can always go back to a candidate and say they have now identified a role they think the candidate would be a better fit for and ask them to interview again.

A dragged-out decision-making process makes a candidate feel less valued. Decision delays also cause candidates to be concerned about what the process indicates about the company's ability to make other important decisions.

2. What to Tell the Candidate

My favorite answer to the question, “What are you going to tell the candidate?” is “I plan to tell them the truth.” I stick to the simple truth, “The client doesn't see you as the best fit for them in this role at this time.” If I have other relevant, useful feedback for the candidate such as comments on their presentation style or experience compared to other candidates, then I share it.

I also remind candidates that competing for a job is like swimming in the Olympics. Michael Phelps won his seventh gold medal by besting Milorad Cavic by one hundredth of a second, essentially by a fingertip. Coming in second or third doesn't mean the candidate wasn't a strong competitor. It just means they didn't win the race.

“I plan to tell them the truth.”

As an employer, commit to making a decision and delivering the news as soon as you have decided.

3. Who Should Tell the Candidate

The recruiter representing the candidate should deliver the news first. That person has consistently communicated with the candidate throughout the process and has represented the interests of the candidate.

If a recruiter (internal or external) was not involved, then the person who handled communicating with the candidate throughout the process should deliver the news. If your company has a habit of interviewing candidates without identifying a person responsible for communicating with the candidate, you should fix that.

At times, it is smart and appropriate for a company to also reconnect with the candidate after the recruiter has delivered the news. Paying attention to how candidates feel about the company at the end of the process is a smart strategy. This is particularly true when recruiting senior executives, but it applies to all levels.

Getting a brief call from a key decision maker who expresses appreciation for the candidate's interest can launch a beneficial long-term business relationship. Every candidate who interviews, from a custodian to a CEO, should walk away feeling appreciated and feeling positive about their interactions with company. Allow those interactions to be bridges to future recruits. That junior accountant you passed over may someday be the CFO you need.

Don't let your company's lack of communication throughout the process, or the delivery of the answer NO ruin your chance to get a second opportunity to recruit that candidate. Companies who graciously deliver the answer NO are more likely to be referred to other talented people by the same people they choose not to hire.

It is important to make a great first impression, and it is equally important to make a great last impression.

If your company has a habit of interviewing candidates without identifying a person responsible for communicating with the candidate, you should fix that.



"Your mom likes you ... well, heck, that's all we need."

THREE THOUGHTS ON Preparing Your References to Help You Get the Job

Your resume got you noticed. You have aced the three rounds of interviews. You really want the job. They have asked to call your references. Who should you suggest they call?

I remember an incident when a recruiter colleague was shocked by the poor reference one of his candidates received from a coworker. It turns out that in the few days between the candidate offering names of references and the references being called, one reference's relationship to the candidate changed from coworker/girlfriend to coworker/bitter ex-girlfriend. Her comments reflected her new status in the candidate's life. Neither the candidate nor the reference confessed their relationship was more than work-related, so the negative comments were particularly surprising. He didn't get the job.

Many of us can do a better job of thinking about who would provide the most useful references to help us land the position. We often offer names of people we felt close to or have stayed in contact with. Instead, we should be thoughtful about who will provide the most relevant insights into our job performance.

Helpful references will not merely say kind things and remark on how nice you are. References should be able to confirm what you have accomplished and describe how your performance compares to others who have held the job. References should speak truthfully about how you respond to adversity and failure. Most importantly, the best references will speak to your aptitude to continue growing in your roles and meet future challenges.

Getting the most out of your references requires preparation. First, you must make an effort to stay in touch with people who can serve as future references. In addition to asking their permission, it is smart to prepare your references to speak to the concerns of the employer.

Although companies check references regularly, they aren't automatically good at it. Employers are not always prepared to ask relevant questions. People who give references are also not inherently good at it. Particularly, when reference sources lack background information about

The best references will speak to your aptitude to continue growing in your roles and meet future challenges.

the future employer and role, they don't always do the best job of offering helpful information. You can help both parties derive and deliver more effective information.

The best references connect your past, your present and your future.

Here are three thoughts on preparing your references to help you get the job.

1. What is the employer trying to prove? Share that information with your references.

Throughout the interview process, questions from interviewers revealed what about your background most interests them. You learned which accomplishments excited them. You learned what technical skills they feel you have, and you learned what they feel you lack. As you plan who to offer as references, think about who can offer insights that confirm your strengths for the role, address any lack of experience or technical skills, and can attest to your capacity for growth.

- Identify the top three to five key success factors in the new job.
- Which former boss or coworker can offer proof about what you have accomplished in past roles that best mirror what you will need to accomplish in this new role?
- Think about the best anecdotes that describe your accomplishments.
- Look at the gaps between what you know and what you will need to learn to grow in the role. How have you previously closed those gaps?

2. Who should you ask to serve as a reference? Tell them why you are asking them to speak on your behalf.

The most helpful references know things about you, your job performance, and your interactions with coworkers and clients. Think about who can speak to those factors.

- Who knows what you were supposed to be doing in your past jobs?
- Who knows how well you were doing that job compared to others?
- Who knows how to measure and describe the value you brought to the role?
- Who knows what else you contributed?
- Who knows how to describe your aptitude for future success?

3. Prompt the employer to ask better questions

When offering references, most people only include a name and phone number. To help the employer ask better questions of the references, offer more information and context. Offer the name, title, company, best contact information (office and cell phone numbers, email address) and something to ask them about. Suggest topics that relate to the key success factors of the new job, your past accomplishments and your ability to master new skills.

- Ebenezer Scrooge, CEO, Scrooge & Marley, 555-1234; ask about my role in assisting Mr. Marley in leading his business unit to exceed profitability goals, resulting in my promotion to Mr. Marley's role after his untimely death.
- Jenny, co-worker, 867-5309; ask her about my unofficial role as leader of the team; how I helped the team operate efficiently, resulting in production awards won by the team.
- Wilson Pickett, entertainer, 634-5789; ask about my role as business manager advising about tour planning, resulting in scheduling fewer performances while commanding higher appearance fees.
- Prince Charming, client, 555-6789, ask about the Cinderella Project. After my team's security failure led to an unidentified ball attendee, my team led the investigation to identify the princess. After the initial search failed, I volunteered a new strategy that focused on unlikely candidates and found the mystery princess, leading to my promotion to Lead Investigator.

With preparation and planning, you can help your references help you get the job. You can help your future employer ask good questions that identify your strengths and past accomplishments. You can help your next boss understand what additional contributions you will make. You can help them set aside reservations about any lack of skills or experience by understanding how you have grown in past roles.

The best references connect your past, present and future. Decisions about hiring are often based on what you can prove about what you've already done. The best jobs aren't just about your ability to replicate your past. The most interesting jobs present opportunities to develop new skills and move up the management and leadership ladder. A great reference can help reinforce the employer's decision that your past performance is a good predictor of your future abilities.

Suggest topics that relate to the key success factors of the new job

The best references connect your past, present and future.



THREE THOUGHTS ON Counteroffers

It's Friday morning. You have the offer letter from your new employer in hand. It is now time to resign. You make an appointment to speak with your boss. Right after lunch, the two of you sit down, as you have many times before. This time feels different.

"Boss, I'm submitting my resignation. Here's the letter. My last day will be two weeks from now."

You watch the wave of emotion wash over her face. Confusion, concern, anger...and then you see her calm down.

You watch the wave of emotion wash over her face. Confusion, concern, anger...and then you see her calm down.

"Let's talk about this. Two weeks is a short amount of time to fill a job as important as yours. Would you consider giving us four weeks? You know your clients love you and this is going to be disruptive to our business. You haven't told your team yet, have you?"

"No, I haven't told anyone. I wanted you to be the first to know"

"Tell about your new job. What's the company? What's the job? What's the offer?"

She's your boss. You've worked well with her for five years. Without giving it more thought, you get excited and start sharing details about your new job and the increased compensation.

"That sounds interesting. Give me two hours to put together a plan."

Two hours later, your boss asks you to join her in a meeting with her boss. Now, you are nervous. You've never had a meeting with Mr. Big Boss before.

"Welcome. Good to see you," Mr. Big Boss says as he asks his assistant to get you a cup of coffee. "We should



have had this conversation some time ago, but now is as good a time as any. Ms. Boss tells me you are thinking of resigning. Let's talk about the future we have planned for you here at XYZ Company. Here's the new job we have designed for you, and the increased compensation."

You are a bit stunned. It's the same job you were offered at the new company, and with additional compensation above the new offer. Had you known this was your future at XYZ Company, you never would have interviewed for your new job.

You should prepare yourself for a counteroffer before you resign.

"Let's tear up that resignation letter. Let's call the new company and tell them you have reconsidered. Then let's go grab a drink and celebrate your promotion." Mr. Big Boss just asked you out for a drink. You are impressed. You pull out your phone to call and withdraw your acceptance. But should you?

This should not be a decision that you're just now considering for the first time. Instead, you should prepare yourself for a counteroffer before you resign. Know what you want to do in case a counteroffer

is made so you aren't taken by surprise. In theory, counteroffers seem great. In practice, they seldom are. Here are three thoughts on counteroffers.

1. Counteroffers solve the employer's problem, but not necessarily yours.

Resignations are disruptive. Your boss had a plan for how the work would get done, and you just threw a monkey wrench into it. Keeping you prevents an emergency. Keeping you is an immediate solution to an unplanned situation.

Would your boss be offering you a promotion/raise if you hadn't resigned?

Before you accept a counteroffer, ask yourself these questions: Would your boss be offering you a promotion/raise if you hadn't resigned? Are there hidden strings attached? Will your new position be implemented immediately, or are they asking for time to figure out who will do your old job? Did they really change your position, or did they just layer more work on top of your old job? Did they immediately increase your pay or did they defer it?

2. Counteroffers seldom address the reasons you searched for a new job.

You sought a new job for a reason. Remind yourself of what it was. Chances are the issues that concerned you still exist. Promoting you doesn't magically solve any of those problems. If your primary motivation was compensation, then you should ask for a raise before you accept the new position. If compensation was not your greatest concern, then you must ask yourself if the additional compensation is worth staying for. Particularly, if your job exhausts you physically and/or emotionally, you will still be exhausted after the initial thrill of a larger paycheck wears off.

If your job exhausts you physically and/or emotionally, you will still be exhausted after the initial thrill of a larger paycheck wears off.

3. Counteroffers erode trust.

You managed to interview and land a new job without your boss knowing about it. Your resignation surprised her. As much as you have a right to look for your next opportunity and a responsibility to plan your career growth, you ambushed your boss. Your trusted relationship will never be the same.

There are many statistics floating around about how counteroffers don't stick. Some articles say 70%, others say 85%, but either way, the consensus is most people who accept a counteroffer do not stay in the job much longer.

Raises or promotions given through counteroffers were delivered under duress. A company planning to promote you isn't planning to surprise you. You will know when you are being groomed for promotion.

Your boss will not be more inclined to address your concerns once you accept the counteroffer. Your boss will grow to resent you for continuing to raise issues, for disrupting their plan, for delaying their bonus (that raise had to come from somewhere in the budget) or for causing resentment among other employees who thought they should have been considered for promotion.

Once your boss solves her immediate problem, the next step is to make certain the short term solution doesn't upset long term plans. When she considers the increased compensation, the impact on other team members, and the possibility that they in turn will threaten to leave, her best option may be to restructure quickly by eliminating your job and laying you off.

If the counteroffer doesn't address your concerns, erodes your relationship with your boss and coworkers and may lead to you leaving the job shortly anyway, why accept it?



THREE THOUGHTS ON Resumes – Would You Call You?

You've worked hard on multiple drafts of your resume. You've asked your trusted advisors to review it. They tell you it is fine. But is it?

Will your resume get you noticed? Will you get calls for interviews? Or will your resume only accomplish what most resumes do... get you eliminated from consideration?

There are two keys to writing a great resume: content and real estate. The content must be compelling. But just like in real estate, location matters. Where information is placed on your resume makes a difference to the reader.

Most of us make the same fundamental errors on our resumes. We reflect our past instead of projecting our future. An effective resume needs to do both. We let a typo or two sneak past us. A great resume will be carefully edited for grammar, spelling and length. Be as brief as you can be while still making pertinent, impactful points. A good rule of thumb is two pages to describe a career of ten years or less; three pages for twenty years, and four for more that. Some people may need an additional page to describe publications, speaking engagements, civic activities or board memberships.

The biggest mistake people make regarding their resume is to assume someone in the screening process will read the entire resume before deciding to eliminate the candidate from consideration. That seldom happens.

Resumes are frequently skimmed. Resumes are rarely read from start to finish. The initial screener may be looking for basic facts like education, titles and years of experience. The next reader may be looking for key accomplishments that show how well the candidate has done prior jobs. The hiring authority may also be trying to predict how well the candidate will meet future challenges.

**There are two keys
to writing a great
resume: content
and real estate.**

Writing a resume is the second most miserable part of the entire hiring process. The most miserable part is reading resumes. Resumes are boring. Resumes often lack distinguishing content and do not flow as a satisfying story. The best resumes recognize the importance of capturing and keeping the reader's interest.

Ask yourself a critical question: "Would I call ME?"

A resume needs to serve several purposes. First, your resume needs to get the reader's attention. Second, it needs to describe your professional history. Finally, it needs to project how well you will meet the company's future needs.

It can be an eye-opening experience to review your resume through the eyes of the recruiter; human resources professional and the hiring authority. Objectively examine your resume as if you were doing the selection and hiring. Ask yourself a critical question: "Would I call ME?"

Here are three thoughts on effectively arranging information on your resume so YOU will call YOU.

1. The Billboard

The purpose of a billboard is to quickly capture attention and ignite interest. A billboard doesn't tell the audience everything they want to know about the subject, but it tells enough to let them decide if they are interested in learning more. You drive past a billboard at high speed and get enough information to decide your next action.

The first third page to half page of a resume is the billboard. You can get your audience's attention with bullet points that identify significant accomplishments and career highlights. The key is those achievements need to spark the imagination of your next boss. They need to see you as a potential solution to the problems they are trying to solve.

Imagine your reader glancing at the first half of the first page of your resume. Did they quickly get enough information to know they want to learn more about you? If not, they are not likely to read the rest of your resume. If you fail to capture their attention in the first half of the first page of your resume, they are probably not going to read further. Your resume is now in the reject pile.

2. The Brochure

Brochures are a great marketing tool, except most people don't read a brochure to investigate their interest in a product. They read the brochure to verify their interest.

The section of your resume following the billboard is the brochure. Describe the company (size, industry), your title and role, and the reason you were recruited. What did the company need you to accomplish when they hired you? What was the biggest problem they needed you to solve? Describe how well you met those objectives. Describe the additional and unexpected accomplishments you delivered. Identify the financial value of your achievements.

Employers are most interested in your more recent experiences. Make sure there is depth to this information, especially covering your last three jobs or the last ten years.

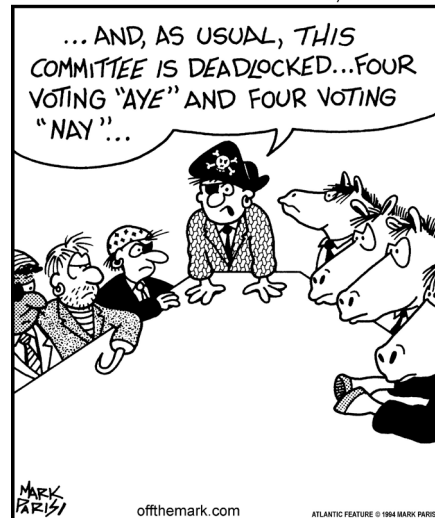
Like any well-written brochure, this section should show the employer reasons to confidently believe you (the product) will deliver the desired and expected results.

3. The Body of Work

The body of work is your chronological employment history, education and certifications. Present your most recent employment history in more detail than more dated or unrelated material. Avoid just listing job duties. Focus on key factors that show how you benefited the company beyond your core job duties. For instance, my first office job was as a receptionist. On my first resume, I didn't mention answering the phones. Instead, I featured the clerical work I voluntarily did to support the accounting department and sales department, which led to my first promotion to accounting assistant.

Tell the story of your past through the prism of why those skills matter today. It's not just about what you did. It's about how what you did prepared you to do the work you desire to do today.

The billboard got their attention. The brochure verified their interest. The body of work laid out the details and facts about your career and employment history. Create compelling content. Arrange the information in an interesting narrative. Finally, read your resume through the eyes of your next boss. Make sure YOU would call YOU.



THREE THOUGHTS ON Search Committees: Avoiding the Split Decision

The search committee has interviewed five great candidates. Everyone liked someone a lot. Now it's time to make a decision. Everyone on the committee has a vote, and uses it to support different candidates. Now what?

I once did a pro-bono project for a non-profit organization to find an executive. My role was to help the board of directors manage the process and arrange interviews. The board had run ads and had a stack of resumes. The board chair gave a copy of all thirty resumes to each board member. They pledged to spend the weekend reviewing resumes and scoring the candidates.

"What criteria are you using to score the candidates?" I asked.

It was soon obvious that the board had not discussed any elements of their decision making process. While they had drafted a position description, they had not compiled a score card or established a process for evaluating the candidates, much less a process for arriving at a consensus decision.

"What criteria are you using to score the candidates?" I asked.

Most hiring decisions are not made by one person. Formal search committees or groups of decision makers work together to interview and evaluate candidates. Then comes decision making time, and the committee learns it was unprepared from the beginning to arrive at a consensus. It realizes it has no plan for what to do next.

Even in the rare instances where there is a single decision maker, they need to think in advance about how they will decide.

Here are three thoughts on deciding how to decide and avoiding split decisions.

I. What is the basis of the decision?

Most hiring decision makers will say they are trying to decide who will be the best fit in the job. But what does that actually mean? It can mean something different in every hiring situation.

Examine the position description of the role you're trying to fill. What are the three key things the candidate must be able to do? What do you consider proof that they can do it? What indicates a person will be a good personality fit or corporate culture fit? What additional skills, experience or education would be nice to have?

When I evaluate candidates, I score them this way:

- **#1 key thing they must be able to do – 25 percent**
 - **#2 key thing they must be able to do – 25 percent**
 - **#3 key thing they must be able to do – 25 percent**
 - **Personality/Cultural fit – 15 percent**
 - **Extra benefits the candidate brings – 10 percent**
-

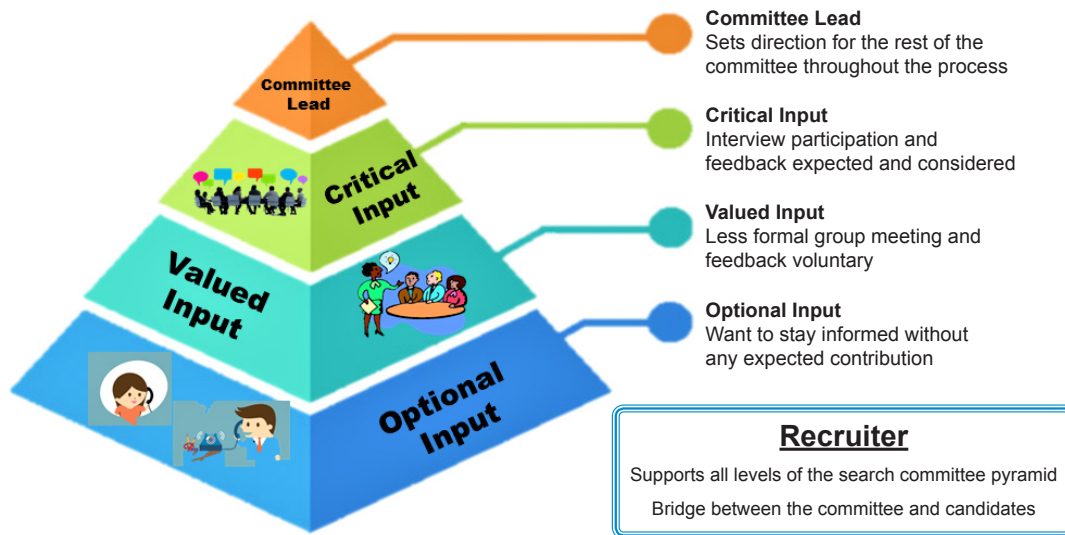
The goal is not to find candidates who hit a perfect score of 100 percent. If a candidate meets about 70 percent of the client's criteria, then I want to discuss the candidate with them. Candidates with the same total score, even very high scores, will not have the exact same combination of strengths. Often, I discover accomplishments and experiences that will prove to be valuable to the client that deserve emphasis but were not part of the original criteria. That's why a human recruiter will always be a better evaluator of talent and potential matches than a computer will ever be.

Whether you are a sole decision maker, a search committee, an executive management team, a partnership member, or a recruiter, you will benefit from thinking in advance about your decision criteria. Ultimately, the right choice may not be the candidate with the overall highest score. The best fitting candidate will have a combination of the right things that make them the one to choose.

2. Who Gets to Decide?

Committees are great for making group decisions and getting things done. Who are we kidding? No, they aren't. However, they are the best option when you don't want purely authoritarian rule.

Every pyramid has a peak. The person at the top of the decision making pyramid should consider who needs to be involved in the process, why they should be involved, and what their roles will be. What is the purpose of having the candidate interview with each of these individuals?



First, set expectations for what the interviews are supposed to accomplish. Help people understand their role. When asked to conduct an interview, most people expect to examine a candidate's experience and skills in detail. Interviews are often conducted in a hostile manner, where the interviewer is searching for reasons to say no. They expect to be able to reject a candidate.

People asked to meet a candidate have a different set of expectations. "I'd like you to meet Sally. I'm thinking of hiring her," conveys a very different meaning than being asked to interview her does. The more you clearly express the purpose of having people meet candidates, the better they will structure productive conversations to meet those objectives.

Distinguish the roles and responsibilities of interviewers of early-stage candidates and delineate those from the roles and responsibilities of people who are asked to meet with finalists. Think twice about whether courtesy interviews are really necessary. It's easy to fall into the trap of thinking that small companies or small teams need to involve everyone in the process.

Some companies feel it is important to have subordinates interview potential new bosses. Think about the "what ifs" before you commit to that. What if the poorest performer on the team rejects the candidates? What if there is a split decision? Meetings between a finalist and their presumed subordinates are sometimes better handled in a less formal meeting, such as cake and coffee as a group.

Next, set clear expectations about what their opinion will mean. "I liked the candidate," may be enough to support a decision to hire. "I didn't like the candidate," should require more information, more reasoning, and a discussion about what if the person is hired anyway.

3. Agree to Disagree

Talent shows like American Idol and America's Got Talent involve multiple decision makers. Even when limited to three or four judges, the shows don't require a unanimous decision. The key to their success is they have agreed

IN ADVANCE what the rules of decision making will be. None of the judges expects to solely accept or reject a contestant.

Hiring committees need to do the same thing. Agree in advance what the rules of decision making will be. Agree who will have an absolute veto. Agree who needs to be in agreement to make the answer yes. Agree how the participants who don't get their preferred outcome will handle the situation. For instance, no one should feel they have license to tell a new employee they didn't support their hire. Once a candidate accepts the role, they are on the team and should be made to feel welcome. No employee wants to know they were the second or third choice, even if they were.

Agree in advance what the rules of decision making will be.

Examine your company's decision making process. Is it helping you hire the best talent available? Or is it hindering you? Are you consistently able to land your most desired talent? Or does your process encumber you to the point that you only get to hire the last person standing?



THREE THOUGHTS ON Search Committees: Treat or Treat

Since its debut in 1966, I've probably seen "It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown" fifty times. After being a recruiter for twenty years, this scene of the Peanuts gang trick or treating always reminds me of compensation discussions.

Lucy: I got five pieces of candy!

Violet: I got a chocolate bar!

Patty: I got a quarter!

Charlie Brown: I got a rock.

Companies, candidates and recruiters often view the compensation discussion as the ultimate Trick or Treat. You either get the treat or you've been tricked. Companies want to pay as little as they can to get the talented people they need. Candidates want to get as much guaranteed compensation as they can. Recruiters feel stuck in the middle, sometimes doling out treats, but sometimes finding they've been asked to deliver a rock.

In theory, negotiating appropriate compensation is complicated. Clients tell recruiters they want to recruit top talent, but contradict that objective by targeting industry average compensation. Candidates want to make sure they get the best compensation plan the company can offer, but often ignore some of the factors required to justify top pay. Recruiters want to bring both parties together as the bridge between two sides trying to gain an advantage over the other.

**Companies, candidates
and recruiters often
view the compensation
discussion as the
ultimate Trick or Treat.**

How can the company, the candidate and the recruiter navigate their competing interests about compensation?

Concentrate on fairness. These competing interests are only in theory. In practice, negotiating appropriate compensation can be easy. At my executive search firm, The McCormick Group, fairness simplifies the process. Whether through an outside recruiter, an internal human resources recruiter, or direct discussions between the manager and the candidate, focusing on fairness will help each party arrive at a compensation plan that addresses the interests of the company and the candidate.

Here are three thoughts on what each party can do to determine fair compensation so everyone gets candy and no one gets a rock.

I. The Company

Companies set compensation through the budget process. How much money has the company budgeted for salary and benefits for the role? All companies try to be conservative about expenses and maximize profits.

Companies also rely on industry surveys to determine average compensation for particular skills and adjust them for geographic differences. Then the company identifies candidates and makes a calculation of prior compensation plus a small percentage increase to determine the offer.

The problem with that process is it perpetuates existing wage gaps between groups of men and women and minorities. People who have been historically underpaid and unfairly treated will never close the gap when the system compounds the problem. Equal work for equal pay is a rallying cry most people agree with, but close examinations of actual pay structures in some industries over the past hundred years show the disparities exist and have not been adequately addressed.

Progressive companies will set fair compensation based on how they value the job, no matter who does it or how that person's previous employer valued their last job. Slight adjustments may be made to account for differences in experience, but for the most part, if a company doesn't adjust their expectations for job performance based on experience, then they shouldn't adjust the pay. Set pay based on what the value of the job performed well is to the company. The talent market will soon learn of the company's reputation for fairness and the best performers will aspire to work there. Poor performers ultimately do not benefit the company, no matter how much money is saved on salaries.

Think beyond the first year, especially when trying to recruit candidates who will drive growth and increase revenue. Decide how compensation will increase as the results are delivered. Candidates appreciate understanding how delivering great results over three to five years will be rewarded.

How can the company, the candidate and the recruiter navigate their competing interests about compensation?

Progressive companies will set fair compensation based on how they value the job

2. The Candidate

Know your value. Do your homework to identify salary trends for your occupation, years of experience and level of performance. Be honest with yourself. If you don't have a history of delivering exceptional results, do not expect to command exceptional pay. Prove your worth on your resume by expressing clear accomplishments and their financial value to your prior employers.

Understand the entire compensation package. Differences in the value and cost of benefits, the availability and structure of bonuses, and other perks may make a compensation package with lower guaranteed base pay a better value overall.

Know what you value. Understand what you want to receive in exchange for doing a good job. Fair base pay is certainly important. Opportunities to earn performance bonuses can be a way of directly connecting the results you deliver to your compensation. Remember to consider the environment. The misery of earning good money with a terrible team or uninspiring leadership seldom outweighs the joy one derives from working with great people.

Identify the fair baseline salary for your work, look at your bottom line requirements and choose the situation that offers the best combination of the things you most value.

Similar to the advice for companies, think beyond the first year. Ask questions about how strong performance over time will be rewarded. Opportunities for promotions, increased base salary, additional bonuses or other perks and benefits help you plan your career path at the company. You will know when you have maxed out your potential growth at the company and you can plan strategically to make a move at the right time.

3. The Recruiter

Whether the recruiter is employed by the company or is an outside third party, they play an important advisory role in determining fair compensation. Recruiters should regularly solicit facts and opinions from candidates, competitors, supervisors and executives about what fair compensation should be for their company or client's situation.

Expectations are different for established companies versus startups, industry leaders and large companies compared to small ones, public companies versus privately held firms. Know how the industry and geographic area values the talent you seek. Understand the competition for the talent you are trying to attract. Understand what a company needs to do to be attractive to the best talent. Why would they come to work for this employer? Compensation won't be the only factor; so be certain to consider multiple reasons.

**Prove your worth
on your resume by
expressing clear
accomplishments and
their financial value**

Trick or Treat? No one in the hiring process should feel tricked. Compensation discussions should not result in winners and losers. Compensation should be a win/win. Be fair. The best companies are not trying to take advantage of their employees. The best candidates expect to deliver results for fair pay. If the employer and the candidates set their sights on what's fair, they will quickly see where their interests overlap.

Trick or Treat? A culture of fairness will attract talented people and positive results will prove to be a treat for everyone. No one, not even Charlie Brown, deserves a rock.

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THREE THOUGHTS ON Giving Thanks

Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays. Gathering with family and friends to celebrate the love we share is a pleasure. I love the purpose of the holiday. Remembering to count our blessings and give thanks is important. The best of us remember to do it daily. The rest of us are reminded to do it on Thanksgiving Day.

As I reflect on the meaning of the holiday, I am reminded that the words Thank You are the two most powerful yet underused words in business. As a customer, I am disappointed when my business is not appreciated. As a recruiter for twenty years, I know I have sometimes failed to adequately express my gratitude to the many people who help me do my job. I pledge not to make that mistake ever again.

At a networking event last week, I was asked, "What do you do?" I replied, "I spread kindness." That is not my usual answer, but it was Election Day, and we seemed to be a bit short of kindness. As I continue my work of matching talented executives with deserving companies, I am now focused on spreading kindness throughout my day, and remembering to say thank you at every opportunity.

Here are three thoughts on harnessing the power of **Thank You**.

I. Candidates

When one is job hunting, it is easy to focus on the rejection scorecard more than the kindness scorecard. Remembering to thank people for acts of kindness, big and small, will help you maintain a more positive mental attitude. It's also one of the easiest ways to be remembered for all the right reasons. The key to a memorable

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thank you note is show you made an effort to go beyond the basic thank you. I counsel people on their resumes and job searches. Most remember to say thank you via email. The people who stand out make an effort to thank me for a specific piece of information or an insight they find useful.

Follow every interview with a thank you note. The note should be sent via email immediately. You should collect business cards or email addresses from each person you meet with and send a note to each individually. The notes should be brief; usually four sentences are all that are needed. Something like, "Thank you for the great meeting. I really enjoyed our discussion about (insert topic here.) I could really benefit your company (insert the result here) by my ability to (insert your solution here.) I am very interested and I'd like to continue the conversation." Make some variations so they don't feel you sent them all the same message.

It is smart to also send thank you notes by snail mail. Email thank you notes are necessary because of the length of time it takes to get snail mail delivered, especially in large organizations. Snail mail notes are more powerful than email notes and make a more lasting impression. Many people will read a snail mail thank you note more than once. We feel great when we hold the note. We are reluctant to discard them. Buy some blank cards or nice stationery. Hand written notes are best. The notes can be brief and should have some variations from what you sent in the snail mail.

Many people thank the people they meet during the interview, but forget to thank internal human resources people or recruiters. Make yourself memorable by acknowledging the important role they played in getting you the interview, even if you don't meet them in person.

If you don't get the job, a final thank you note to the decision maker and recruiter is a good strategy. Let each of them know of your continued interest in the company and your willingness to consider other roles. Let your graciousness and kindness be the things they remember most about you.

2. Companies

Most companies (dare I say ALL companies) can do a much better job of thanking the candidates who apply for jobs at their firm. Every person who interacts with your company can become an ambassador of good will.

The first response from most organizations is their internal recruiting and human resources teams don't have the resources to respond to every candidate. The problem with that response is that it violates the Golden Rule. "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." It's a pretty simple concept. If your business practices have you treating people in ways you would not appreciate being treated, please examine and change those practices.

Every candidate who applies for a position should receive an acknowledgement. An email confirming receipt of their resume or application that explains they will only be contacted again if there is interest in scheduling an interview is sufficient. No one likes feeling that their resume went into a black hole.



Every candidate who interviews should be thanked and receive an answer about the final outcome. Not saying yes is bad enough to a candidate. Never saying no is worse. Thank candidates for their interest, and leave open the possibility of contacting them in the future if a more fitting role is available.

Treat people the way you like to be treated when you are the candidate.

3. Recruiters

Every day, people help recruiters do their job. By responding to inquiries, returning calls, making referrals and agreeing to interviews, candidates, clients and colleagues help recruiters be successful. Remember to thank them.

Thank candidates for considering the opportunity. Thank hiring authorities for interviewing candidates. Thank people for sharing information and making referrals. Loop back to people and let them know the positive outcomes that result from their efforts. An email note, "Sally, thanks for referring me to Bill. He was very helpful. I'm grateful," is all that is needed. It will make Sally's day, and she'll be helpful again the next time you ask.





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Cheryl specializes in executive searches for people who make things happen in areas of operations, business development, accounting, finance, and administration. Her tenacity and persistence make her particularly adept at difficult assignments. Cheryl demonstrates great insight into the needs of both employers and candidates, and uses those insights to drive mutually convenient solutions for both parties.

Working with a wide range of employers from global consulting firms, to public companies, to small businesses, Cheryl brings an understanding of the critical challenges facing each firm. Whether searching for a CEO, a vice president, a practice leader or a business developer, Cheryl identifies the compelling components of client opportunities and matches it to the interests of confidential candidates. She regularly represents candidates transitioning from government to the private sector, as well as key executives in the public sector market.

Cheryl came to The McCormick Group in 1999 after 15 years of experience in accounting and operations. She was an accounting systems consultant for PricewaterhouseCoopers. During the first administration of President Clinton, she served as Chief of Operations and Special Assistant to the Secretary at the United States Department of Energy. She was Regional Controller for Earle Palmer Brown and controller at several smaller advertising agencies.

She is the lead singer and songwriter for the band Mojo Hounds and is the proud grandmother of two girls and a boy.

Matching Talented Executives with Deserving Companies

“Three Thoughts On”

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