

# RECRUITING BEST PRACTICES IN A CANDIDATES' MARKET

May 15, 2025



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## Introduction

- My background
- Learning environment
- Participant profile



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## My Perspective

- Worked in and consulted to the A/E/C Industry for 3+ decades
- Extensively involved in internal recruiting while at the Zweig Group
- Have been providing executive search and recruiting services to the A/E/C Industry for nearly three decades (from C-Suite down to PM level)

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### Foundational Points

- Is it still a candidate's market?
- Why do recruiting professionals get a bad wrap? (Group discussion)
- Biggest weakness I see in A/E/C firms' recruiting efforts is a lack of proactiveness and "professional tenacity"
- The "Posting Panacea": Why is posting necessary, but not sufficient?

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### Foundational Points (cont.)

- Why is a position description needed?
- How do you know if you need external recruiting assistance?
- Difference between "contingency" and "retained" recruiters

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### Your Greatest Recruiting Challenges (Group Brainstorm)



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## GETTING YOUR DUCKS IN A ROW




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### Position Description

- Should view as a marketing document
- Don't make too lengthy—but include “softer” information like culture

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### Talking Points/Pitching Angles

- Rationale for search
- Firm background/services
- Culture
- Marquee clients/projects
- Differentiators
- Firm's greatest challenges (candidates can sense a “sales job”—candor goes a long way!)
- Advancement opportunities

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## Interview Guide

### • Don't forget these questions:

- What was your reaction to the position description?
- Are you familiar with our firm? If yes, what are your perceptions?
- Why did you leave your previous positions (walk through their most recent employers)?
- What do you like most about your current firm/role?
- What do you like least about your current firm/role?

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## The Interview Guide (cont.)

- Why do you believe you'd be an asset to our firm?
- What are your areas for greatest professional growth?
- What is your philosophy/approach towards mentoring/professional and leadership development? (For managerial/leadership roles)
- Tell me more about your job search (what exactly do we want to tease out??)
- What salary range would cause you to stand up and take notice?
- Are you an owner? If yes, do you have a non-compete?
- Tell me more about any timing constraints (e.g., waiting for bonus; wanting to wrap up a project; how much notice to provide employer)

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## The Interview Guide (cont.)

### • What to suss out for seller-doer roles:

- Involvement in BD (maintenance vs. new)
- Participation in client-facing professional associations
- Talks to client-facing groups
- Dissemination of thought leadership content
- Involvement in RFQ/RFP responses
- Participation in shortlist presentations
- "Please provide an example of when you nurtured a prospective client into a loyal advocate. How did you go about doing this?"
- (Their LinkedIn profile is a good indicator)

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## CANDIDATE IDENTIFICATION



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### Candidate Identification

#### Primary tools



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### Candidate Identification: Think Outside the Box

- Executive Directors of professional associations
- Professional association committee members (especially for seller-doers)
- State licensing boards (e.g., lists of professional engineers)
- Helpful/kind candidates who are not interested

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### Future (BD) Leader Identification: Keep an Open Mind with Titles

- Externally—target:
  - Senior Associates
  - Associate Principals
  - Principals
  - Vice Presidents
- Titles mean different things at different firms

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## CANDIDATE OUTREACH

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### Candidate Outreach/Ongoing Communication

Use ALL Tools (Why??)

LinkedIn

Phone Call

E-mail

Texting (with caveat)

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### Candidate Outreach Tips

- Create a script to be used when leaving messages and reaching out over LinkedIn (see Rich's sample)
- Implications of a hybrid working environment on candidate outreach
- What should be the cadence of outreach?
  - Outreach #1: Phone message followed by LinkedIn message
  - Wait 7-10 business days
  - Outreach #2: Rinse and repeat
  - What if a candidate responds with interest (even if just curiosity)?

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### Candidate Outreach Tips (cont.)

- Strategies for avoiding the “gatekeeper”
- Hint: Try calling in the evening to access employee directory

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### Communicating with Candidates: LinkedIn Tips

- Communicating within LinkedIn can be confusing and frustrating—why?
- Upgrade to LinkedIn Premium—but prudently:
  - Choose correct package—don't have to pay for LI Recruiter
- If a candidate responds with interest, move communications to phone/text/e-mail

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### Communicating with Candidates: Additional Tips

- Stick to your word
- Avoid unnecessary gaps of time between communication:
  - In absence of data, candidates will “write their own story”
  - Other firms may enter the mix

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## INTERVIEW PROCESS

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### Interview Process: Initial Phone Screening

- Determine in advance which questions are most important to ask
- Determine in advance whether to request resume (judgement call)
- Disarm candidate by sharing as much background information as possible (conversation must be 2-way street)
- How to handle the salary/comp discussion:
  - Know your state laws!
- Know which questions are off limits

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### Interview Process: After Phone Screening

- Design process in advance (round 1 virtual vs. in-person/duration/participants; subsequent round(s))
- Send appropriate background information to interview team (e.g., candidate profile if working with third party; resume, LinkedIn profile)
- Determine interviewer make-up/pairings—be mindful of appearance of “ganging up”
- May want to divvy up topics among interviewers
- Debrief candidate after each round (why?)

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### Candidate Debriefing After Each Round

- Stock solid questions to ask:
  - How did it go?
  - What were your impressions of Person A, etc. and the firm overall?
  - How has your interest level changed after this meeting?
  - What new questions or concerns arose after this meeting?
  - Please update me on your job search.

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### OTHER FINAL STEPS

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### Final Steps (cont.)

- Reference checks: Words of wisdom
- Crafting a competitive offer—tools at your disposal include:
  - Signing bonus
  - Retention bonus
  - PTO
  - Flexible working arrangements (greatly dependent on position/role)
  - Candidate perks

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### RED FLAGS/QUESTIONS I'M ASKED THE MOST

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### Red Flags

- Candidate focus early and primarily on salary
- History of job-hopping (but times have changed/generational differences)
- Mercurial candidate communication frequency/styles (lower levels can be particularly mercurial)
- Candidates not following directions
- Candidates being late for scheduled phone calls/interviews
- LinkedIn profile caveats:
  - Beware that not everyone who is licensed includes that in their profile

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## Other Questions I'm Asked

- What's the story with non-competes?
- What's the story with personality tests as part of the recruiting process (PI, Hogan Assessment, DISC, MBTI)?
- How do you tease out "tire-kickers"/those who are just curious?
- How do you handle the "salary dance"? (i.e., the exchange of information—including your salary range)
- Do you have a rule of thumb for "candidate yield" based on the initial target list?
- Is it "ethical" to recruit from competitors?

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## ADDITIONAL ADVICE

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## Advice from the Front Lines

- ALWAYS check in about a candidate's job search—avoid being blindsided!
- Retaining future leaders:
  - Even a small % of ownership decreases turnover (Rory case study)
- Play the long game with candidates:
  - Life happens—Rich's case studies

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### Read *The Friedman File* for Additional Insights...

#### Recruiting and Retaining Staff in a Candidates' Market: One Firm's Story

With nearly every A/E firm in existence desperate to add technical staff, a strategic approach to recruitment and retention can be the difference between winning and losing in the battle for talent. In this issue of *The Friedman File*, we examine how the Fish Companies, a 575-person, multidiscipline science and engineering company, has been able to keep its turnover percentage low and its hiring success rate high across its 28 locations.

**Can an Interview Be "Enjoyable"?**

Jobseekers will tell you that the interview process can be one of the most nerve-wracking experiences that a human can endure. According to employment consulting firm ADP, 95% of job candidates have experienced anxiety related to their interview.

And why wouldn't they? Strangers firing questions at you that you may or may not be able to intelligently answer. Doubts swirling in your head: is this the right fit for me? What's the salary? Are the benefits good? What are the people like? Would I have a future here? And, making a mistake leaving my old job? Nervousness, uncertainty and fear are common emotions.

How can a firm overcome a candidate's apprehension enough to allow their true personality and professional capabilities to shine through? At Fish (sounds like "fish"), the hiring process is extensive, with multiple members of Fish's team for employees across the organization participating and weighing in on the candidate's suitability. Yet,

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### WANT MORE TIPS, RESOURCES, CASE STUDIES, & BEST PRACTICES?

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