

Do It Yourself Legal Recruiting

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The trend isn't new, but in this economy, it's not uncommon to see companies resort to "Do It Yourself Legal Recruiting." After all "Why should I use a legal recruiter and pay a fee for a job I can do on my own?" The sentiment is that there are so many job seekers out there that it can't be that hard to find talent. You can choose a DIY legal recruiting solution, but the reality is that it's not always the cheapest or easiest solution. In fact, you may come up empty handed.

A Tale of Do It Yourself Legal Recruiting Gone Wrong...

Recently, we received a call from a director of human resources at a growing company who tried the "DIY" approach to legal recruiting. She had been tasked with recruiting for a replacement General Counsel, and decided that she would go ahead and handle the legal recruiting herself. She posted the job on several websites and quickly started to receive resumes...a lot of resumes!

The sheer bulk of the resumes received took this director and her staff more than fifty percent of their time to review and process. Rather than being able to handle their day-to-day responsibilities, they soon found themselves strapped with the enormous task of going through hundreds of resumes, not to mention follow-up calls and emails from anxious applicants waiting to hear back on the status of their submissions.

Then came the troubling reality that after sifting through hundreds of resumes and applications, few seem to be a match, at least on paper. Next came the calls to the few applicants they had selected. It soon became clear that none turned out to be a good match – as they unearthed issues related to skill set, personality fit, salary considerations, relocation, references, etc.

In short, after conducting their "Do It Yourself Legal Recruiting" they came up empty handed, and the executives were getting increasingly anxious. By the time the human resources director called, they needed someone "yesterday," and had been spinning their wheels for the past three months. With seemingly so many candidates available, what went wrong?

Can You Tell The Difference Between a Good and a Great Lawyer?

The "DIY" approach is great when the stakes aren't high. In other words, if the position is not critical to your company, and you can spend months going through endless resumes, then it might work out for you, if you're lucky. DIY has its limitations and risks. Anyone can review a resume against a set of requirements, yet few people, except for lawyers and legal recruiters, have the expertise or the time to fully go through the resumes and understand what those skills are and how to properly evaluate them. In other words, I could not tell you a good medical specialist from a mediocre one based on a resume and job description alone. Could you?

Legal recruiting is a specialized field; dedicated professionals build entire careers around it. It takes more than writing a job description and posting it on a job board to hire a talented professional. As a DIY recruiter, you might understand that your company is looking for someone with M&A experience, but can you evaluate one M&A deal from another? Do you understand the financing aspects of a purchase? Do your candidates? How much did they contribute to the deal? Are they paper pushers or strategists? Can you tell the difference?

Are You Passively Collecting Resumes of Actively Targeting Candidates?

The reality is that bulk of any legal recruiting effort does not involve posting a job and waiting for the phone calls and resumes to pour in. In fact, passive recruiting often yields very little results. You often get the resumes of job seekers you are desperate to get back into the job force and will tailor their resumes to any job just to get their foot in the door. Successful legal recruiting is the result of professional networking and technical understanding; knowing the right players in the industry, identifying and seeking out the right talent for a specific opportunity within a specific company, and properly evaluating a candidate's technical skills.

Legal recruiting is not only about being able to review a resume; it's about digging deep into a candidate's background, skills, and motivations to determine if they are a good fit. Effective legal recruiters spend a great deal of time screening candidates, gaining an understanding of their credentials, experience, skill, abilities, style, salary history, motivation, and personality fit as it relates to the company that is hiring. They will do this process many times over and only send the viable candidates that match the company fit. A hiring manager may only see a few candidates from a recruiter, but that recruiter has most likely sorted and interviewed dozens in the process. An internal recruiter seldom has the time or resources to do this.

Are You Selling This Opportunity Based on Your Market Knowledge?

Legal recruiters don't only screen and source candidates; they also sell the company and the position. They seek out to fully understand the unique selling points of the company and the position to effectively relate them to candidates and create a level of interest that will continue through the offer stage. This is called "pre-closing." The best candidates aren't simply looking for a job they are seeking "opportunities." It can take great finesse and communication skills to make that connection. It also takes a great deal of knowledge of the legal market to be able to provide an accurate representation of the position as it relates to other opportunities. Savvy candidates can tell the difference between a baseless pitch and one based on market knowledge and understanding.

How Well Do You Know In-House Salaries and Comparable Compensation?

Market knowledge also means understanding compensation. Often "DIY" internal recruiters base salary on what a predecessor was earning; or when there was none, on budget considerations. Often, they go in blind, without a real understanding of what "market" compensation is for the type of candidate they are seeking to hire.

When salary comes into play, as it always does, a legal recruiter can educate all parties about the numbers and trends for their industry and location. As legal recruiters this is all that we do; we study the job market and speak with hiring companies and employed professionals constantly. As a result, we can share figures that accurately reflect market conditions, and work with internal recruiters to modify a candidate's profile to match compensation requirements as well. This eliminates the need to second-guess what a workable package can consist of, having to cut discussion short with good candidates because compensation is not up to par, or wasting time or candidates in drawn out salary negotiations.

In Other Words...

Next time you are thinking about "Do It Yourself Legal Recruiting," think about what it's going to take to deliver the right hire to your company. My grandmother said it best, "the cheapest solutions often turn out to be the most expensive." For anyone who has attempted to be a weekend warrior and try DIY solutions, you might know exactly what I mean. Do it right the first time, and hire professionals to do the job.