

Working with Recruiters & Staffing Firms

Third-Party Recruiters and Staffing Firms

Third-party recruiters and staffing firms normally charge the hiring company, not job seekers, for their services. This means that it's not their role to "find you a job" – their focus is to find candidates for their client companies. Are you that candidate? That's what they want to know.

Develop a relationship with a recruiter as you would with any person in your network. It could very well be beneficial to your career because they have a foot inside many doors that you might like to walk through. One of my old managers used to say that applying to work with a staffing firm is like applying with 50 companies at once.

Nowadays, it's absolutely necessary to partner with a good recruiter or two in your job search. This can be the key to a successful move, and, in most cases, nurturing these relationships will make a difference to your career over the long term. It's pretty common for seasoned recruiters to work with a person who they helped years before and, for whatever reason, now has to look again. I've had the opportunity to work with candidates in two and three job searches over the course of their career. A recruiter friend once told me about when a candidate she'd helped off and on for fifteen years called to see if she'd assist his daughter in her job search!

There are four main ways to work with recruiters and staffing firms: contract, temporary, temporary-to-hire and direct hire. Each method or option has its pros and cons, and some can even be combined during a job search. I would advise that you ask yourself which option or combination of options might work best for you and then factor that into your strategy.

Ins and Outs of the Different Options

Contract	Contract employment is usually described as a long-term, project-based job during which you use professional-level skills. Projects can be short term or long term, and you are either self employed as a consultant or employed/paid by a third-party firm.
<i>Why do it?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Contract jobs usually offer excellent wages.• Contract jobs offer freedom and variety to move from place to place, company to company, and/or project to project, adding skills and interest to your career.
<i>The flipside</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• There's a certain lack of stability, so the contractor's lifestyle may be better suited to a risk-taker type of personality.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is uncommon for contractors to be offered benefits, so costs may offset the relatively higher wages if you plan to secure self-funded benefits.
Temporary	<p>Temporary assignments can vary in length – from a day or two (e.g. while an employee is out sick, is out training, etc.) to several months (e.g. while an employee is on medical leave). Often, but not always, temporary assignments entail duties requiring lighter skills, especially the short-term ones. Many people refer to temporary jobs as “transitional” jobs, but I’ve met a few professional temporary employees over the years. These types of workers usually have other interests such as acting and music, so being non-committed to an traditional employer suits them.</p>
<i>Why do it?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Temporary jobs fill the gap in between employment and can help provide some income when you need it. • You can keep your skills up-to-date and just maybe even add new ones. • Temporary assignments can sometimes open doors. Through networking with those you encounter on assignments, you might hear about a great job opening inside or outside the company. • Temporary work can be used as a path of exploration into new industries and new career possibilities, especially if you’re fresh out of school or have just moved into town.
<i>The flipside</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It does take a commitment of time away from a full-time job search, so you might want to use temporary work as a last resource. • Sometimes assignments end abruptly, and this can be disconcerting to a “Steady Eddie” type personality – someone who likes to know where the work is coming from tomorrow. • Wages are often lower because the tasks tend to be entry-level. • If you are receiving unemployment benefits, you will want to find out what your state agency’s rules are about temporary employment income, and you will need to find out how the staffing firm reports information about your employment status to your state agency.
Temporary-to-Hire	<p>The temporary-to-hire option allows a company and a job candidate to go through a third-party during a designated assessment period. Sometimes the trial period is an economic choice for the company, but more often the trial is used to be sure the employer/employee match is a good one before a commitment to hire and acceptance of employment is finalized.</p>

<p><i>Why do it?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While they are evaluating you, you can be evaluating them. Do they offer what you want? Do they meet your top priorities as an employer? • If the staffing firm has a strong relationship with the hiring company, they should be able to give you insight and feedback during the selection and hiring process. Should things not work out, technically you would still be employed by the staffing firm and wouldn't have to show a possible short-term disaster on your resume.
<p><i>The flipside</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check out the benefits situation – does the staffing firm offer anything while you are their payroll? Also, when you are hired by the company, how long do you have to wait to qualify for their benefits? The time you're temporary probably won't count toward that period. • Even though many temporary-to-hire positions start out as temporary and evolve to temporary-to-hire status, most temporary-to-hire jobs requires a fresh interview process. Sometimes, because of the possibility of a trial period, both you and the hiring manager might chance a less thorough interview and selection process. This increases the risk factor of a mismatch. • Be clear about this point – are you expected to stop your job search and will the employer stop their candidate search when you start working for them during the trial period?
<p>Direct Hire</p>	<p>Executive search firms, third-party recruiters and most staffing firms offer the option of presenting you for regular positions with their clients. It is called direct hire because the hiring company does not request that you go through the payroll of a third party but, rather, hires you directly as staff. Most recruiters are paid on a contingency basis – when they make the placement, they are paid – while others work on a retainer basis. Either way, their primary commitment is to the company who has engaged them for the search. However, if you spend the time to develop this relationship, you might just find that a seasoned recruiter can become a long-term advocate and coach for you – someone who can be there as your career develops and it's time to make further job advancements.</p>
<p><i>Why do it?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A good recruiter will represent you and “sell” your candidacy well and will have both a trained as well as innate sense of matching you to available opportunities. He or she will also likely have the edge of an established relationship with the hiring authority, allowing him or her to be able to persuade the hiring company to interview you better than your cover letter ever could. • Since there's a good chance a recruiter will know his or her client well,

	<p>you'll receive extra guidance you wouldn't otherwise have interviewing on your own. He or she should give you insight to the company's culture, tell you about the hiring manager's interview style, and assist with salary negotiation.</p>
<i>The flipside</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Third-party involvement can be frustrating at times when the company uses the recruiter as a buffer to protect themselves from direct contact. Some go-getter type personalities might find it tedious to work through someone else. • Clarify your obligation to go through the third party for future employment by the hiring company because most recruiters and firms have contractual terms governing this area. You might not be able to be hired directly without the third party's involvement for a period of time after having already been presented by a third party to that company.

Choosing a Recruiter to Work With

With so many choices in the market, how do you know when you've connected with the right recruiter to work with? It's great when you are linked up with a recruiter through a referral, but what if he or she calls you out of the blue? This is someone who can make or break the way you are represented to prospective employers. Even if a recruiter is highly successful, he or she might not be a good match for you. So, how do you know?

Here are several good questions you should consider just to be sure:

- Do they start pitching opportunities without really getting to know what you want?
- Do they ask you what you want and don't want and then *really* listen to what you say?
- Do they make you feel like you're partnering in the process, or do they treat you like you're a bother?
- What is their process?
 - Will they ask you before presenting you to their clients?
 - Are they willing to help you get ready for the interview and spend some time debriefing you afterward?
 - Do they check your references... and when?
- Who are they? What do you know about their history, credentials, certifications, background, team/colleagues, company, client mix, and other candidates they've represented?

7 Things You Need to Know to Work Well with Recruiters

Once you figure out that you've partnered with a good recruiter, how do you work with them to get optimal consideration for positions with their clients? Here are my seven best tips on working with recruiters:

1. Using more than one recruiter at a time depends on the size of the market and if they do regional or national searches...
 - Don't sign up with everybody because you a) don't want to work with so many it's hard to maintenance relationships and b) don't want to tie their hands and/or demotivate them, which will happen if they feel you've already saturated the market.
 - If you use too many recruiters, you run the risk of criss-crossing opportunities, and you want to be sure you're not being presented multiple times for the same position. Not only can this lead hiring managers to believe you're desperate (which will undercut you in the salary negotiation stage), but it might also be perceived that you lack loyalty and will play the field for your own self-interest. Even if these scenarios are unintentional, they're simply not good messages to chance sending to potential employers.
2. Telling a recruiter where you are interviewing and what stages you're in with prospective opportunities can be helpful and is advisable, but be aware that this can backfire if you don't trust each other. If you're working with a recruiter you know has your best interests at heart, you'll want to have a lot of two-way disclosure. A good recruiter will leverage such information to effectively nudge and encourage the hiring company through the process. If you can't trust your recruiter, then you should be moving on anyway. Also, if they can't trust you to keep quiet about a confidential job you're working on together, then they will definitely move on down the road, too. Bottom line... be sure you're both on the same page.
3. If you're not hearing back from the recruiter it means that they don't have anything for you at the moment. However, they're like anyone else in your network, and they can forget about you if you don't stay in touch. So many people complain about recruiters not calling them when, in my opinion, it goes both ways. While your job search is probably not the only thing on their minds, remember, the squeaky wheel usually gets the grease. Just don't be pushy about it... just like you wouldn't be pushy to anyone else in your network.
4. Don't always think about what your recruiter can do for you, but also think about what you can do for your recruiter. They'll remember you, love you and will work on your behalf more enthusiastically. Written and emailed thank you notes go a long way as well. Referrals are even better!

5. Be responsive. Give immediate feedback to them and be open in your communication. If they don't know about it, they can't help you. Ask for feedback too.
 6. Help them to help you. A written summary of your strengths or a job-duty analysis for a certain opportunity is very useful. Be open to changing your resume as needed, or provide an addendum to reflect specific qualifications/accomplishments they think will be pertinent. Another thing they'll appreciate is if you alert your references to their possible call.
 7. Respect the boundaries with their client companies. If you want to make a direct contact, e.g. a thank you note after an interview, be sure to ask about it and then copy them as well. Better yet, ask them to help you proofread it – they'll not only appreciate it, they'll very likely provide some great advice since they know their clients best.
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About the Author:

Angela Loëb, Certified Personnel Consultant, has been a career services professional for over sixteen years and a recruiter for fourteen. In addition to recruiting, she provides human resources consulting services to companies, and as a job search consultant, she offers workshops and individual sessions.

She is involved behind the scenes of the Career Development Network and serves on the board of the Launch Pad Job Club. She is a member of the National Association of Personnel Services, the Texas Association of Personnel Consultants, the Capital City Association of Personnel Consultants, the Society of Human Resource Management and the Austin Human Resource Management Association.

She also publishes a motivational blog exploring attitude and inspiration called *Attitude and Longitude* (<http://angelaloeb.typepad.com>), which occasionally features inspirational anecdotes and insights about job search.



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