



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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What a Recruiter Wants You to Know

by Alan J. Sheptin

In the 20-plus years that I've been in the actuarial profession, I have spoken to numerous recruiters about a myriad of positions, from consulting to life insurance to reinsurance. Additionally, I've been a user of their services, both when I was looking for positions and when I was searching for talent. However, I have always wondered about their job, and how they go about working with candidates and employers.

I recently had the opportunity to speak at length with Pauline Reimer, Director of Actuarial Recruitment at Pryor Associates in Hicksville, New York. She has been recruiting actuarial talent since March 1986. She is also unique in the field: She is an actuary, an ASA formerly with TIAA-CREF, Equitable and the Segal Company. Our talk provided me with considerable insight and some good knowledge for all of you as well!

Who does the recruiter represent? The employer or the candidate?

Recruiters represent both. We want to reach a happy medium, as both are users of our services.

Can a recruiter help a candidate when she/he is looking to expand to a different field within the industry? What can the candidate do to maximize success?

The best way to expand your skill set is to look internally in your current company. If the

opportunity that you want is not available, then you should seek a company where that expertise is available. However, you will most likely need to be hired in your own expertise at the new organization. Get your foot in the door by taking a baby step forward.

Additionally, do things that set you apart. For instance, the CFA exam is a good way to establish credibility for financially oriented roles. Knowing, or learning, a foreign language is important for international positions. Make sure a recruiter knows as much as possible about you professionally, including personal issues that may affect your job search.

When you make a cold call, what is your expectation?

One of my favorite ways to meet actuaries is at conferences. By attending 12 to 15 conferences annually, I try to meet as many actuaries as possible one-on-one.

When I do make cold calls, I introduce myself as an educator, a provider of service. All I want is a few minutes of your time. I do find that companies with openings are typically more receptive to cold calls than individuals.

Why would you turn away a company or a candidate?

If I hear a company is about to be downgraded by a rating agency, or a company is on negative watch, or the reputation of a manager is questionable, I am very careful about whom I would place there.



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Likewise, if a candidate has a negative reputation, such as negative references, I would be cautious about working with that person unless she/he could turn it around.

It is important for candidates to have good communication skills. If I am working with an excellent candidate who needs to improve articulation, I have relationships with English as a Second Language professionals to help these candidates better articulate. I also work with communication specialists who help candidates with speaking skills and presentation styles.

If I've met a candidate who needs to improve outward appearance, I've taken the person on shopping excursions to help pick out a tasteful suit or an outfit for an interview.

Appearance and communication are extremely important when meeting a potential employer. You never get a second chance to make a first impression!

When does networking prove more beneficial than working with a recruiter?

If you are looking internally, then of course networking is far more beneficial. Networking can complement the recruiting effort.

While the benefits to a company could be saving recruiter fees, this does not necessarily work to your advantage, as confidentiality could be compromised. A good recruiter knows that confidentiality is the most important element of the relationship.

Students seeking positions at the entry level need to do more of the work on their own. I am happy to help out and make suggestions on how to go about an effective job search.

What are the best questions a candidate should ask recruiters before working with them?

- How many years of experience do you have?
- In which facets of the industry do you have expertise? Which geography?
- What are your credentials?
- Which conferences do you attend each year?
- What is the length of time it should take to get placed? (typically two weeks to six months)
- Which companies have you represented?
- Can you provide references?

Likewise, the candidate should be ready with a copy of a resume. (It doesn't have to be perfect, as I invariably help perfect the appearance of each resume, in terms of grammar, syntax, etc.) The candidate should be active in the search as well. Be sure to tell the recruiter about types of jobs and companies that interest you and what functions/responsibilities you prefer and why. A good recruiter can help get the right contacts for you and also get you the "inside scoop."



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What are the best questions a candidate should ask an employer about a position?

- How long and why has the position been available?
- When are you seeking to fill the position?
- What are the ideal qualities of the potential hire?
- What is the growth potential?
- What is the culture of the office?
- Where can this position go in the next two years?

The candidate should stay away from discussing salary and benefits. That is the job of the recruiter.

Should the candidate be so forward as to ask for the job at the interview?

No, I don't believe that would be appropriate. However, regardless of the opportunity, always be enthusiastic but never pushy. Even if the job does not fit what you actually want, leave the door open because another opportunity could arise in that company, or they may even customize a position for you if they are very favorably impressed with you.

After an interview, give yourself some time to reflect on the position. The job and/or company may be more attractive to you than you initially thought.

If, after a job interview, the job really interests you, tell the recruiter that you want the job. She/he is in your corner.

This leads me to a question. ... Can a recruiter successfully "point a job" in a candidate's direction?

Absolutely! Recruiters have extensive relationships with companies. We know the cultures of the organizations, the personality of the individual and whether the fit will be a good one.

When a candidate is working with a recruiter, the recruiter can and should call the hiring authority as quickly as possible for feedback and is expected to act quickly. A candidate does not have this ability on his own.

The recruiter does have a lot of influence in the process. Based on candidates' feedback from interviews, I have been able to clarify ambiguities, resolve misinterpretations and rectify situations post interview, resulting in the candidates being hired. This would probably not have occurred had the candidates been representing themselves.

Should a candidate deal with more than one recruiter? What are the advantages and disadvantages to this?

This answer depends on whether you are presently gainfully employed. If you are unemployed, get to work immediately on finding your next job even if you plan on taking several months off between jobs. Use multiple resources; however, be sure to maintain a list of companies where your resume was sent, which recruiter sent it and the end result.

If you are employed and considering a job change, find a recruiter who is knowledgeable and trustworthy, and give that recruiter a chance to do his or her job exclusively. If you

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find that you are not getting interviews, or ones that fit your goals, then explore other recruiters. Some companies' human resources departments support different parts of a company. If a recruiter proposes a position in a company in which you were already presented, be up-front about having been presented already and about what happened. It is possible that the departments' recruiting processes are independent of each other, and the recruiter can still present you without any conflict of interest.

Any parting thoughts?

Be aware that there are a large number of actuarial recruiters out there due to the availability of our directory and the fact that the actuarial profession is such a top ranking profession. But note, insurance companies are regulated; recruiters are not. Do your due diligence before embarking on a job search with just any recruiter. You want someone who is trustworthy, knows the market, and is appropriately assertive with good follow up and good follow through. Remember, you want someone in your corner.

A good recruiter should listen to the applicants' likes and dislikes, educate them and help them find a position that fits the bill. No recruiter ever wants an unhappy candidate. The recruiter's reputation is at stake! □

