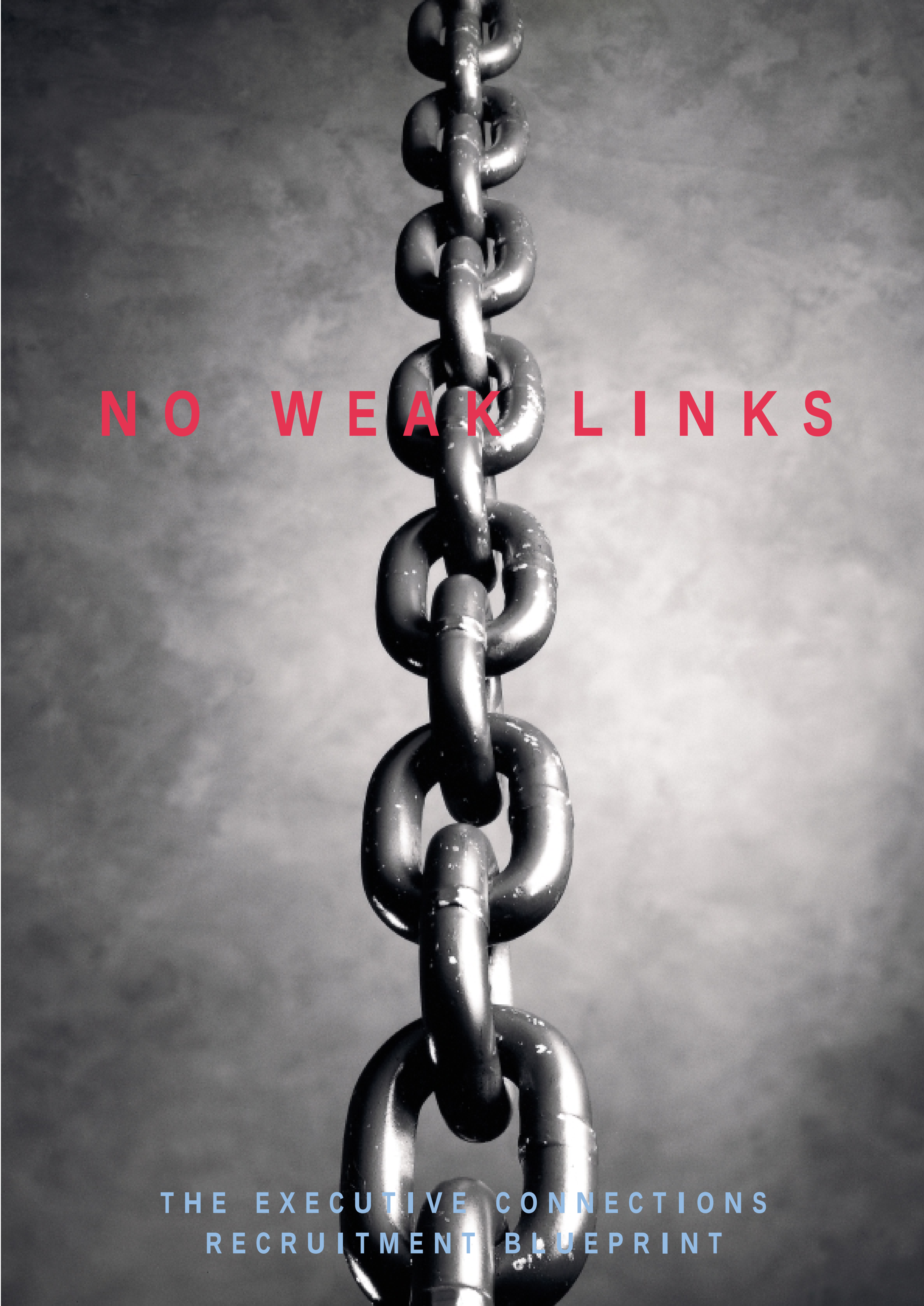
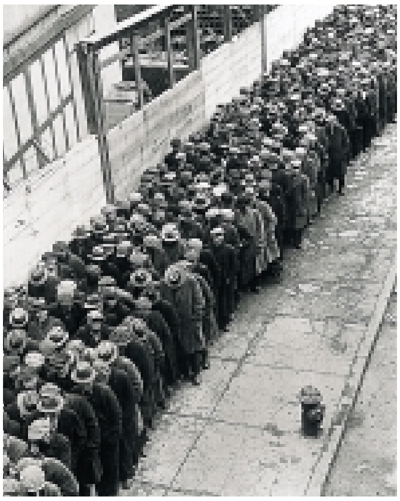


NO WEAK LINKS

THE EXECUTIVE CONNECTIONS RECRUITMENT BLUEPRINT

"Drag 'em in and tell 'em the deal. That's all there is to it."



Back in the depression in the early 1930's, a US construction boss might have been able to get away with such recruitment tactics. In the current, fiercely competitive, candidate driven market of the late 1990's, such an approach would be fatal. The best people would go elsewhere. No top company would dream of behaving in this way.

Or would they?

Over the last couple of years, Executive Connections group has conducted extensive research into the reasons why highly professional companies so often fail to secure their first choice candidates and one of the things we have learnt is that clients and candidates see the recruitment process in very different ways.

For clients the process is primarily rational based initially on qualifications, experience and track record. Clearly the prospective employee will also need to be liked by the interviewer(s) but this issue generally arises later in the process.

Whereas, for candidates, the process is much more emotional. A good candidate will nearly always have a number of opportunities to explore, with all the rational boxes ticked. So what makes the difference is the feel of a company. After all, most people will spend more time working than doing anything else in their lives, so career moves are not taken lightly.

Our research also revealed that a candidate's impression of a company is formed over many more stages than most clients are aware of. The interviews themselves are only a small part of the overall process and, like the links in a chain, a candidate's experience of the whole recruitment process is often affected by the weakest link.

Hence No weak links.

No weak links has arisen directly from the research and is designed to make clients more aware of the number of different stages involved in recruitment from a candidate's perspective and to help them ensure that there are no weak links in their own recruitment strategies.

This blueprint document works by breaking down the process stage by stage, analysing the key dynamics at each point of the process and offering a series of thoughts and suggestions on how the process could be improved.

In the pilot phase, it has already proved beneficial for a number of our clients, resulting in a higher rate of conversion versus offers made, better corporate profile across the board, and savings in time and money invested in recruitment. We hope it will bring your company similar success.

David Hughes
Managing Director
Executive Connections group

CONTENTS

1 THE POWER OF THE PROCESS

Before we start with the first stage of the recruitment process, we should acknowledge that in most cases a candidate will have a base impression of the company recruiting. This will have been formed from a variety of different sources including a company's advertising and PR, previous contact with current or past employees of the company and the views of friends and colleagues.

Having said that, the recruitment process itself can have an enormous impact on a candidate, either positive or negative. Consider the following testimonials:

Candidate 1

"It would have been far better if Company X had never interviewed me in the first place. After I had taken the trouble to do my research, conduct what I thought was a good interview and then write a follow-up letter, they never got back to me. I was so angry I still tell people about it."

Candidate 2

"I can hardly believe how it's turned out. As you know, I had to be persuaded to interview with Company Y as I wasn't convinced they were a company I wanted to work for, but the interview process entirely swung me around. I felt wanted. They were swift and professional at every stage. I had to accept their offer."

These testimonials serve to indicate the power of the process. Let us now break it down and consider how best to make it work. Firstly planning...

2 PLANNING

Although the planning of recruitment is in itself invisible, its effects will be apparent to the candidate at every stage.

We will discuss in more detail specific elements of planning as they are relevant to different stages in the process; but prior to any recruitment activity, the following needs to be fully understood:

1. Exactly what position(s) are you trying to fill? A vacancy should not simply be seen as a straight replacement requirement but rather an opportunity to reassess the role if necessary (particularly in the light of the previous incumbent's reason for leaving). Is it appropriate to promote an internal candidate and recruit at a lower level? Is a reallocation of responsibilities within the department likely to improve efficiency?

Once the role has been defined, a job specification is the best way to present this information. An example job spec is contained in Appendix 1.

2. What is attractive about the opportunity?

3. What career paths might the successful candidate hope to follow?

4. What constitutes the profile of your ideal candidate? An example candidate specification is contained in Appendix 2.

5. What package can you offer an appropriate candidate and how attractive a package is it relative to the rest of the market?

6. When would be the ideal start date (bearing in mind the anticipated time-frame for the recruitment process and taking into account likely notice periods)?

7. What are the budgetary constraints?

The next stage in the process will be to determine the most effective means of recruitment i.e. how we communicate the opportunity...

3 INITIAL COMMUNICATION OF OPPORTUNITY

How we communicate a given opportunity will depend on a number of factors such as the availability of candidates with the necessary skills and experience and the attractiveness of the role on offer. However, the means of communication will normally fall into one of four different categories:

1.Database search

2.Advertising

3.Direct mail

4.Search (headhunting)

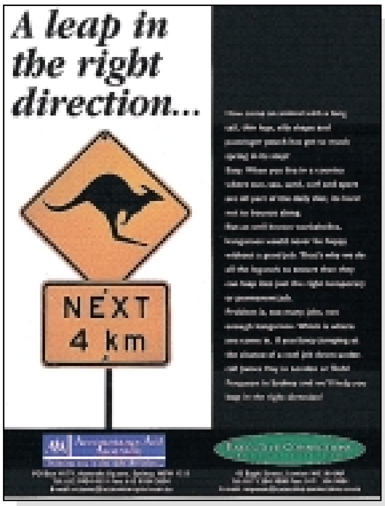
The respective merits of these different routes are covered in Appendix 3 but, as a general rule, top quality candidates are rarely to be found sitting on a recruitment consultancy's database just waiting to be approached, so most assignments will require us to be more proactive in seeking candidates. Advertising and direct mail are the most common methods used.

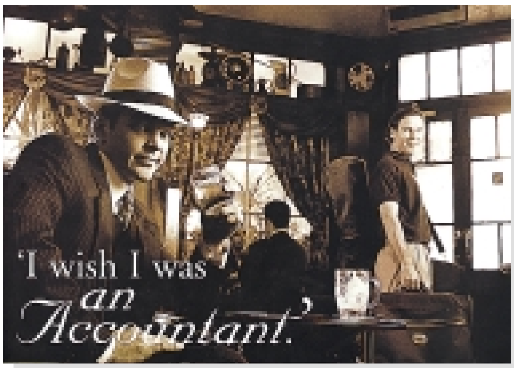
If database search or headhunting are appropriate, then the first contact will normally be a telephone call, which is covered in section 4, but if advertising or direct mail is to be used, we have a prior stage to consider, namely the content and design of the communication, which is important for the following reasons:

1. It must have impact to be effective. These days the recruitment pages of the professional press are packed with opportunities and candidates are inundated with marketing material, so they are often looking for any excuse to ignore uninspiring advertisements or bin uninteresting approaches. We have to cut through and grab their attention.

2. As the first piece of communication in the recruitment process, the impression which the ad or mailer makes is crucial. Does it make a candidate feel good about a company and the role offered, or does it leave a bland or even negative impression?

3. What general impression does it make about the company? Remember, any communication will be seen by many people who may not choose to follow up the specific vacancy but who will nonetheless be presented with an image of your organisation. Is this image innovative and inspiring or does it seem ordinary, even dull?





At the top are two examples of advertisements which have been extremely successful by adopting just such an innovative and creative approach.

And underneath two very different but equally effective direct mail campaigns.

As these examples clearly demonstrate, there is no standard recipe for success. However, an innovative approach undoubtedly creates a much more positive impression as well as generating a significantly better response. Which gives rise to the issue of how to handle the first contact...

4 FIRST CONTACT

Handling candidate responses to the initial communication is a crucial part of the recruitment process. It is the first point of actual interpersonal contact and regardless of who handles the response, the candidate will associate them with the client company. If you are using a recruitment consultancy to handle this stage, never forget that they are representing your company. At this point they are effectively your PR agency; make sure they are creating an impression of which you are proud.

The initial response will probably be a phone call from the candidate, the return of a reply paid card, the submission of a CV or, in the case of database search, a reaction to a call from a consultant.

Phone call

Candidates often tell us how difficult getting through to the appropriate recruitment consultant can be. One candidate told us she spoke to four different people at one consultancy before finally being put through to the right person. In a case like this the consultant is on the back foot even before they have picked up the phone.

When the initial conversation takes place, it is crucial that the consultant does two things: firstly they must begin building a relationship with the candidate, winning their trust and respect. Secondly, they need to enthuse the candidate about the specific opportunity. Interestingly, the best way to do the former is often by being extremely knowledgeable and helpful about the latter.

Be sure your consultant is fully informed, on top of your requirements, has an excellent phone manner, and is capable of promoting the opportunity and your organisation effectively.

Reply paid cards (direct mail responses)

The only real difference here is that the consultant will be making rather than receiving the call; otherwise the same principles apply. However the consultant needs to make the call as soon as they receive the card and to inspire and inform exactly as discussed above.

Consultant initiated calls

The principal difference in consultant initiated calls is that the consultant will need to focus more on creating an interest rather than developing interest which is already there.

How to close the call

Having discussed the position on offer with a candidate, the consultant must ensure the candidate sends in their CV as soon as possible and should close the conversation by giving the candidate the necessary information to do so.

The submission of a CV

A candidate is entitled to expect a prompt acknowledgement of the receipt of the CV and information on the current situation, the next stage of the process and likely timescales. A consultant must meet these expectations as well as instigating direct contact with the candidate to obtain any critical information which is missing from his or her CV prior to beginning the selection process.

A swift and effective reply to all of the responses generated projects a professional image of the company and should offer us the opportunity to filter...

FILTERING 5

The first stage of this process is for the consultant to review each and every CV as it arrives, against the job specification and pre-agreed competencies identified.

Each CV will fall into one of three different categories:

1. Promising: The consultant should contact the candidate immediately to arrange an interview.

2. Possible: Unless there is an unusually high level of responses fitting into the first category the consultant should also arrange interviews with these candidates. Again this should be done promptly.

3. Poor: Further discussion with these candidates neither helps them nor the client. A swift, polite but negative response is required.

Note the importance, in every case, of a swift reply. It is both courteous and pragmatic as you do not want good people becoming disenchanted with the process and going elsewhere.

In the same context, maintaining close contact with the client and letting them know exactly what is happening during the filtering process is also important.

Once the initial filtering has been done, the next stage will be for the consultancy to interview the candidates. For this to work effectively, the interview process must be clearly defined beforehand...

6 DEFINITION OF INTERVIEW PROCESS

In the research, candidates frequently complained that the interview process was repetitive and disjointed. This tended to stem from two common problems:

1. A lack of communication between different interviewers

2. Different interviewers covering exactly the same ground

Imagine you are talking to a new friend and they ask you the same questions over and over again. What is your reaction likely to be? You would think they were not very interested in you or had not been listening. This is precisely the impression candidates get when an interviewer starts covering exactly the same ground as a previous one.

Hence the importance of defining the interview process. If the consultancy and the client agree in advance who will cover what subjects and at which stage of the interview process, the impression created can be significantly more positive. Candidates will be impressed by an organisation which is seen to have a smart and considered approach to the important area of recruitment.

The consultancy and the client should ensure that they commit time early on to put a clear plan in writing.

Inevitably interviews will flow beyond the specified areas of coverage, so post-interview communication is crucial. It may even lead to a revision of the areas to be discussed during the next interview if necessary.

Agreeing the way in which each interview will end is particularly important. Whatever we do, we must not leave candidates up in the air. We need to tell them what is going to happen next and who needs to do what.

This leads us to the first interview - with the recruitment consultant...

7 INITIAL INTERVIEW WITH CONSULTANCY

The most effective assessment of potential candidates requires interviews to be conducted skilfully by trained and experienced consultants. If competencies have been identified earlier in the process, it is essential that interviews are conducted by consultants fully trained in competency based interviewing. Insist that the recruitment consultancy follows this rule.

Competency based interviewing requires the interviewer to assess whether an applicant is competent in a particular area or set of areas - these competencies will have been specifically identified as being those that are most likely to lead to success in any particular position.

The more commonly used criteria based interviewing is a means by which a candidate's suitability for a role is evaluated by reference to experience, education, leisure activities, personal circumstances and aims and future plans.

Irrespective of the technique being used the following general information should always be covered:

1. Discuss the CV in detail, identifying and probing any gaps or omissions

2. Examine responsibilities in each position of employment

3. Analyse achievements in each position of employment

4. Establish precise details of present remuneration package, including all benefits and incentives and dates of most recent/next review

5. Probe reasons for wanting to move and any problems with current employer, work environment, role etc.

6. Discuss in detail the type of role they are seeking and why

7. Analyse reasons for leaving/joining previous employers

8. Assess academic suitability for the job in question

9. Assess, where possible, technical and administrative skills

10. Assess interpersonal skills

11. Discuss long term career objectives

12. Establish progress against other job opportunities being pursued

At the end of the interview the consultant should ensure that the candidate is aware of the likely stages of the interview process and the timescales involved.

The consultant should also offer the candidate a copy of their brochure as an introduction to the consultancy and, more importantly, specific material on the company recruiting and the job in question, which leads us to the subject of briefing material...

8 BRIEFING MATERIAL

Good candidates will appreciate being provided with as much background information as possible. Ideally, we should offer the following:

1. An impressive company brochure

2. The latest annual report

3. A departmental or divisional brochure (or an organisation chart if not available)

4. A clear and attractively laid out job specification

5. A sheet of further information on things which might be of interest to a potential employee

The first two items should be standard and relatively easy to obtain. Item three may or may not exist, and although helpful, is not essential. The last two items will require some effort but are extremely important.

- The job specification is a key tool in selling the opportunity and should be written as attractively as possible. An example of a well written and well presented spec is contained in Appendix 1.

- The sheet containing further information need not be long but a page of points made and signed by the departmental head, covering anything from the fantastic growth of the area and its expansion plans, to introductions of key personnel, to the nearest tube stop, best local pub, next company day out etc. could have a great impact.

Whatever the information provided, it must be carefully and professionally presented. Such attention to detail can put you ahead of your competition and merits serious consideration.

N.B. Executive Connections group has helped many clients create a departmental or divisional brochure stylishly and cost effectively. If you do not already have one, we would be happy to assist in its production.

So, armed with the appropriate briefing material, the consultant is suitably equipped to consider the selection of candidates for client interview...

9 SELECTION OF CANDIDATES FOR CLIENT INTERVIEW

Once the consultancy has filtered CVs and interviewed candidates they should be in a position to recommend a shortlist.

As we have previously stated, the quality and integrity of the client/consultant relationship is very important. So a recommended shortlist really should be accepted as it stands. After all, a consultant has nothing to gain and much to lose recommending that a client interviews an inappropriate candidate.

When presenting the CVs of the shortlisted candidates to the client, it should be borne in mind that a CV only tells part of the story. The consultant will need to complete the picture for the client, making them aware of anything of particular relevance which is not evident from the CV.

The client should then ensure that the complementary information from the consultant is passed on with the CV to anyone else who may be involved in the recruitment process.

Upon approval of the shortlist, the consultancy then needs to communicate the news to the candidates and to arrange interviews with the client. For obvious reasons interviews arranged for early morning or late afternoon are likely to be most convenient for candidates and can significantly speed up the recruitment exercise. A consultant should also ensure that all candidates are prepared for the client interview in exactly the same way, guaranteeing a level playing field.

The next stage in the process is to confirm the arrangements for the client interview...

10 CONFIRMATION OF CLIENT INTERVIEW

Once the time and place for the interview has been agreed with the candidate by telephone, the recruitment consultancy should, as a matter of course, confirm the details in writing.

A friendly letter to the candidate from the client confirming the details, accompanied by a map detailing the best way to reach the client's offices can create an even better impression. It demonstrates the client cares enough to take responsibility at this stage and further personalises the process. Here is an example of such a letter.

This brings us to the client interview...

AAA
BANKING CORPORATION
1 City Street London EC2

Ms P Leyton
14 The Street
Town
Nearshire NV2 3H

Dear Candidate, (first name)

Following your conversation with (recruitment consultant), this is just a note to confirm that we very much look forward to meeting you, here at our offices, at 6pm on (date).

To quicken the process up, we thought it might be a good idea for you to meet a couple of our team, so in addition to myself, you will also get a chance to meet Mark Williams (explanation of who Mark is).

Although you may already know where we are, I have also enclosed a map just in case. When you arrive at reception, please ask for me.

Mark and I very much look forward to meeting you next Thursday.

Yours sincerely

11 CLIENT INTERVIEW

As suggested earlier in this document, planning is key to effective recruitment. Interviews are no exception. Each stage in the interview process should seem like a logical and natural progression from the previous stages (including those with the consultancy) and should refer back to them. To achieve this continuity, consistent communication between all parties involved is critical.

Having set the background, let us now look at the interview itself.

The issue

Although much of a candidate's impression of a company is formed beforehand, the first interview with the client is probably still the most important stage in the entire process. This is the first time the candidate actually meets the potential employer. The impression clients make is crucial, so how do they make the best impression?

Let us put ourselves in the candidate's shoes. A good candidate is likely to be pursuing a number of options simultaneously, often with the client's competitors. The competition will almost certainly be professional and well organised but what sort of an impression are they likely to make on our candidate?

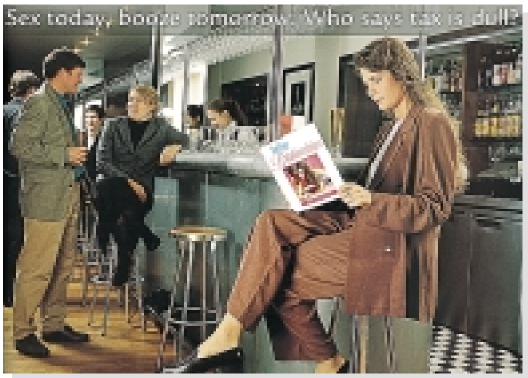
In most cases the answer will be just that, *professional and well organised.* Someone will meet the candidate at reception and escort him or her to a smart meeting room (just as smart as all the other smart meeting rooms the candidate will have seen). After a short while one or two formally dressed interviewers will come in and conduct a pleasant but ordinary interview, ending with the customary smiling and hand-shaking. The candidate will probably leave thinking the meeting went reasonably well. But what about from the recruiting company's point of view?

They might be thinking, *"This candidate is great. Now we just need to get them to meet X, Y and Z, and we can get them on board".* However, even though they may well have won the candidate over rationally, the formal context of the interview is unlikely to have won them over emotionally. Consistently our research shows that the emotional element to the recruitment process is crucial in a candidate's final decision on his or her next career move.

Assuming that the offers on the table are materially similar, the deciding factor becomes *"Which offer feels right?"* Then factors like comfort, their impressions of the people they met, whether they think those people like them etc. become critical. Candidates may be one small piece in a sizeable recruitment jigsaw to some clients but consider the candidate's point of view. As we have already stated, most people spend more time working than doing anything else in their life, so career moves are not taken lightly. It is a lot more than one piece of a jigsaw for the candidate.

Towards a solution - environment / atmosphere

How might we be able to win candidates over emotionally as well as rationally in this crucial first interview? Imagine we communicated the job opportunity with the following mailshot:



The shot was taken in the Zinc Bar, a stylish restaurant owned by Terence Conran. Just think of the impression we could make on candidates if we took them to the same bar for the interview; to choose a location which links to another part of the process is a very stylish and innovative thing to do.

Recognising that circumstances will rarely allow for such an approach, other ways in which we can differentiate ourselves from the faceless meeting rooms could include using an office with a panoramic view, or one overlooking the trading floor. A visit to the company restaurant or bar (which will also allow the candidate to get a better feel for the company) can also work well. Instead of offering simply the usual tea or coffee, consider some fresh fruit juice and some biscuits. Small touches like these can make a big impression.

Towards a solution - beyond environment

Changing the physical environment is probably the easiest and most obvious way to change the overall interview experience but there are many other things we can do to create the best possible impression. Here are just a few of them:

1. Reception

Ensure that reception knows who is coming, when and who they will be seeing. A friendly receptionist who knows who a candidate is will instantly start making the right impression.

2. Meeting the candidate

Normally a candidate is met by a secretary or receptionist, escorted to an interview room and left to wait, hopefully very briefly, until the interviewer arrives. If left to wait too long, the candidate may feel a subject of hierarchy, or even pomposity. He or she may also question whether the interviewer is disorganised or simply inconsiderate.

Alternatively, a senior figure in a company coming to reception to personally greet a candidate can make a completely different impression, indicating an open, relaxed style of management and letting the candidate know that this interview is important to the client as well. Worth considering?

The candidate should also meet with the person they were expecting. A sudden change of plans, whatever the reason, can leave the candidate with the feeling that he or she has been ‘fobbed off’ to someone else.

But the most common mistake companies make is to keep candidates waiting. Candidates refer to this time and time again, saying how rude it is and, although few of them have done so, many said that they had come close to marching out. However well the interview might subsequently go, it will not be forgotten.

3. Preparation
Too often during interviews, the interviewer treats the CV as a checklist, starting at the top of the first page and then marching on tirelessly until the bottom of the last. Such an approach is symptomatic of a lack of preparation.

It is much better to read the CV properly beforehand and make notes of any specific details to be referred to, as well as a series of questions which will evidence the fact that the interviewer has thoroughly read the candidate's CV.

4. Style
The style of the interview itself is too complex an issue to consider completely in a document of this size. In short, however, the goal is to have a relaxed conversation which skilfully explores a series of predefined areas in sufficient depth to allow an understanding of a candidate's capabilities and motivations. Conversation is an important word. The meeting should feel like a conversation, not an interrogation.

Mastering the art of interviewing takes a long time but for most people, even an introductory course in interviewing can make a significant difference.

To this end, Executive Connections group works very closely with a retained consultancy who are specialists in interview training. All our staff undergo such training on a regular basis and we have arranged many highly successful tailor made training courses for clients. More detail on this is contained in Appendix 4.

5. Selling the opportunity
We need to make the opportunity appear as attractive as possible, motivating the best candidates to want to work for you. One of the best ways to achieve this is to introduce the candidate to people they like and want to work with. Therefore clients should choose carefully who participates in the recruitment process.

Careful consideration must also be given as to the best ways to enthuse the candidate about the company and potential opportunity. Again preparation is critical. Understanding the candidate's “hot buttons” and presenting the opportunity in the best possible light is essential. The candidate must leave any meeting feeling that they really want to work for you irrespective of whether or not you are interested - after all you never know who they might know.

6. How to close
At the end of the interview, the interviewer should ask the candidate to provide feedback to the consultancy as soon as they are able to, letting them know that their opinion is valued.

Following these steps should go a long way towards making a favourable impression on a candidate. The next area for consideration is that of feedback...

12 POST INTERVIEW FEEDBACK

At this stage, as previously discussed, the importance of responding swiftly to good candidates cannot be overstressed. In today's extremely fast moving job market, decisions must be made quickly.

Ideally the candidate should call the consultant shortly after the interview and the interviewer should speak with the consultant within 24 hours. Prompt feedback in both directions is important.

Feedback can take the form of general observations or specific issues to be addressed, but the key is frankness and depth. Therefore, the relationships between the consultant and the candidate and between the consultant and the client are crucial.

If a candidate seems to be wavering, it is vital to know why. Is there a problem with the client? The job? A competitive opportunity? Or something else? Problems cannot be solved without this information.

Once the client and the consultant have spoken, the consultant will call the candidate, to let them down gently or to keep them feeling positive while the client gives it more thought, or, if the client is positive, to keep the process moving forward.

With successful candidates, there will normally be further interviews which will follow the guidelines already covered, though at this stage the environment takes on less importance.

As soon as you have decided to recruit a particular candidate, it is time to make an offer...

13 OFFERS AND NEGOTIATION

When a client is ready to make an offer, the information should be communicated via the consultant and almost never to the candidate directly. Remember the consultant's objective is the same as your own. Furthermore, a consultant manages offers and negotiations on a daily basis and is well practised. Their skills can be invaluable at this stage in the recruitment process.

Armed with the necessary information, the consultant needs to communicate the offer such that the candidate feels valued while ensuring that the client gets value for money. The key words here are negotiation, persuasion and consultation and the negotiation should always be done through the consultant, as he or she can act as mediator bringing both parties together rather than watching them hit head to head.

Prior to communicating the offer, however, the consultant should speak with the candidate to gauge his or her expectations. These may well be driven by other offers they have received, or are expecting. Understanding the competitive situation and the current market is key, because the consultant should be managing expectations, rather than simply passing along information.

The consultant should provide the client with the necessary information concerning the candidate's position so that an effective offer is made. The consultant should communicate the offer, putting it in the right context and making sure that the candidate is receptive to the offer.

Further negotiation may arise at this stage, but is unlikely if the initial conversations have been handled well. In the event that the situation proves tricky, the consultant's primary objective should be to keep the door open. A consultant should not take the liberty of making promises on a client's behalf, but should keep open the client's right of reply. In the unlikely event that the candidate finally prices themselves out of the market, so be it. However, candidates should not be lost unnecessarily because the client appears to be inflexible or unresponsive to the candidate's needs. “Dutch auctions” should be avoided at all costs as the highest bidder rarely succeeds in gaining the candidate's long term commitment.

When a deal is agreed that satisfies both parties, the consultant should then manage the generation and collection of the offer letter. An example of an offer letter is contained in Appendix 5 and ideally should come from the most senior person the candidate has met during the process.

Once the candidate has decided to accept, the consultant should ask them to send a hand-written note of acceptance to the client with confirmation of resignation and envisaged start date.

Resignation is often a difficult and sometimes emotional process. No company wants to lose talented people, so good candidates can expect much persuasion and often counter offers from their current employers.

The recruitment consultancy has an important role to play during the resignation process. Firstly, they can advise a candidate on how to resign - positioned in the right way there is likely to be far less comeback. The likelihood is that their present employer will endeavour to persuade them to change their mind, therefore it is essential that the candidate is reminded about the reality of their present position (highlighting the reasons why they stated they wanted to leave in the first place, as well as pressing the “hot buttons” relating to their new position) in order to resist these overtures. Generally, throughout this awkward period, the candidate needs support and it is up to the consultant to provide it.

Once the candidate has resigned, references can be checked. When they have been checked, a letter should be sent as a courtesy to the candidate, explaining which of their referees has been called so the candidate is then able to thank them. An example of such a letter is contained in Appendix 6.

On a cautionary note, beware that even though the candidate has accepted an offer and formally resigned, he or she may well be subjected to further buy back attempts by their present employer as well as approaches for other opportunities elsewhere. It should also be noted that candidates respond well to further contact from their prospective employer prior to starting their new job. If there is a significant time lag between acceptance and starting work, it may be appropriate to arrange informal meetings with new colleagues to keep the successful candidate abreast of developments and enthused about their new position.

Having received an acceptance from our preferred candidate we now need to notify those candidates who have been unsuccessful. So to rejection letters...

14 REJECTION LETTERS

THE XYZ GROUP

Mr N Briscoe
Avenue House
Millbrook
Swelsley
Yorkshire

Dear Candidate (first name),

Thank you for the effort you put into the recent interviewing process for the position of XYZ (job title).

I know David (the consultant) has explained to you why unfortunately we were unable to offer you the position on this occasion but as it was such a close decision I would like to take the time to let you know that we really were very impressed with your personal approach, attitude and qualifications. The candidate we eventually recruited has two years' experience in preparing off shore accounts (or whatever) which, considering our client list, was a significant advantage.

Again, I will emphasise that our decision was ultimately swayed by the specific strengths of another candidate and in no way the result of any shortcomings in your presentation.

If I can be of further assistance or answer any additional questions you may have please feel free to call me. Otherwise, I wish you the best of luck.

Yours sincerely

The XYZ Group Plc, The Town House, City Square, London, WC1 3DR

When a decision is made not to offer a candidate either a further interview or a job, it is important we let them down gently. A prompt, polite response thanking them for their time and trouble and explaining why they were unsuccessful is not only professional but may leave the candidate well disposed to the company should they wish to reapply in the future.

Standard rejection letters often fall short in this respect. A letter such as the one above from the most senior person the candidate met in an organisation would be so much better.

Writing a letter like this may seem like a chore but as most rejection letters for a specific recruitment campaign will be almost identical, half a page of thought is a small price to pay for the goodwill it brings.

Having sent out rejection letters, the process is still not necessarily over. The next stage could be to look at the effectiveness of the process itself...

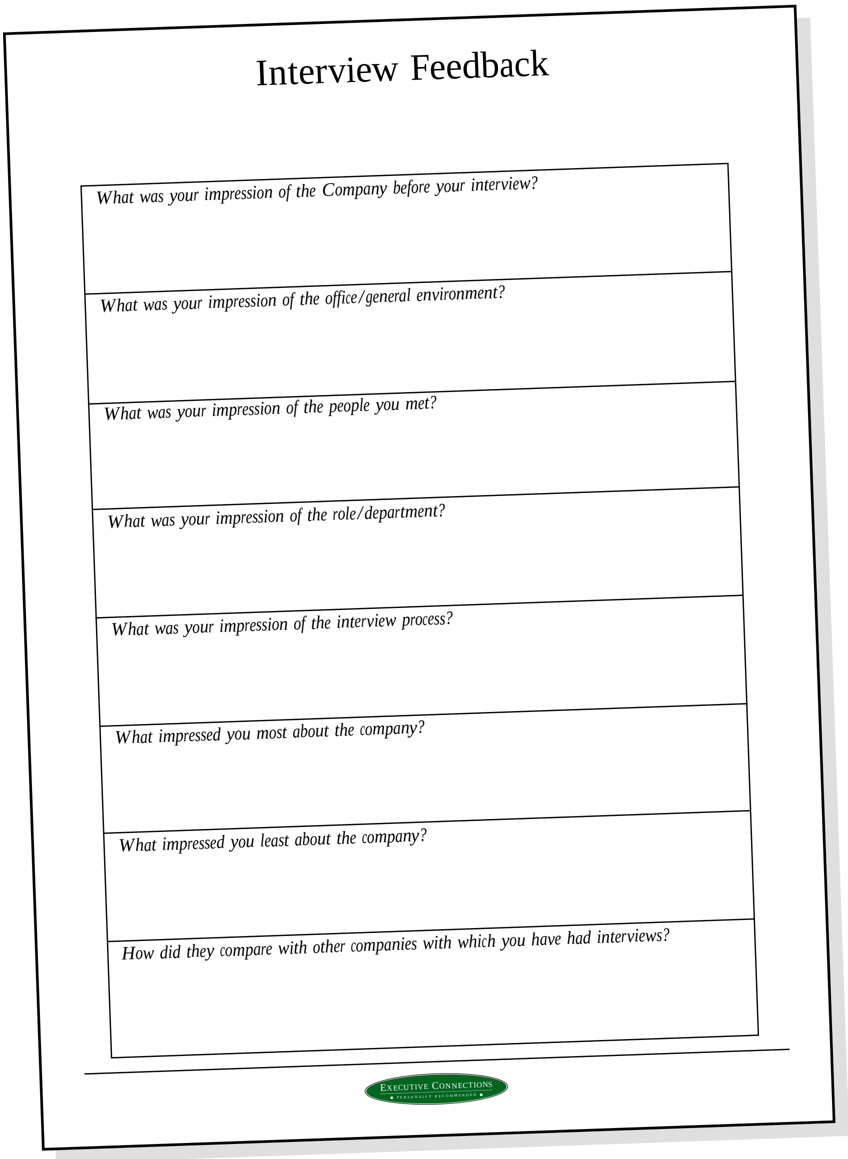
15 FEEDBACK ON THE PROCESS

Recognising its importance and having invested a significant amount of time and energy in the whole recruitment process, we should always be looking for ways to improve it further. The best place to get these ideas is from the people in the best position to judge, namely the candidates who went through it.

Executive Connections group has recently introduced a short telephone questionnaire to be completed with candidates, both successful and unsuccessful, designed to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the process. It is entirely optional but more and more clients are taking advantage of the crucial feedback it brings.

If you would like to hear more about how the research works, please ask.

Although we have now made an appointment, it is not the end of the process. Let us now consider what happens when the person recruited actually starts work...



Interview Feedback

What was your impression of the Company before your interview?

What was your impression of the office/general environment?

What was your impression of the people you met?

What was your impression of the role/department?

What was your impression of the interview process?

What impressed you most about the company?

What impressed you least about the company?

How did they compare with other companies with which you have had interviews?

Executive Connections

16 WHEN THEY START WORK

Many companies believe that once someone is hired, the job is done. Far from it. The first few weeks in a new job are absolutely crucial.

It is surprising the number of good candidates, who, having previously had more than one offer, telephone the recruitment consultancy if they are not enjoying their new job.

A lack of thought and attention to a new employee is unlikely to drive them away, but it can fundamentally influence their long term commitment to the company. You never get a second chance to make a first impression, so their induction is vitally important.

Here are a few thoughts on making the right impression.

1. Before they arrive
For someone entering a new environment, the answers to a few questions ahead of time can be particularly reassuring, so a joining pack is a good idea. It need not be much but a brief explanation of when you expect them to arrive, who they should ask for and what to expect from the first day will really make an impression.

2. The first day
Make them feel welcome. Perhaps take them out to lunch. Make sure the key people take the time to introduce themselves and take an interest in the new employee. Have their workload clearly organised and planned so they know exactly what is expected of them. A formal induction plan including a comprehensive overview of all responsibilities is best.

3. Mentors
The mentor idea works very well in bigger companies. For example, a newly qualified might benefit from a mentor who was at the same stage two or three years previously. For this system to work really well, the mentor should serve two primary purposes:

Firstly, they can identify with what a new recruit is going through and answer many of the questions they may have.

Secondly and more importantly, they are likely to pick up any problems which management might need to be aware of very early, giving them a chance to address them promptly.

4. Feedback
Feedback is crucial. We must invite it and where appropriate, act on it. One way to do this is to institute a regular three-monthly review - a dynamic two-way interchange of thoughts and ideas. Sometimes this works better if the person conducting the review is not one of the managers the employee works for.

5. Thought
Like partners, children or pets, employees need care and consideration. Not in the same way, but little things like a bottle of wine for working really hard on a particularly difficult project; or an invitation to take a partner out to dinner on the company for exceptional work over a longer period; or just saying thank you, perhaps in a formal memo, are all gestures that can make a real difference.

These sorts of thoughtful actions help make an employee feel valued and therefore less likely to leave, so it makes really good business sense.

These are only a few ideas. No doubt you will have many others. Pick the ones that suit the situation best and use them. You may find that your level of staff retention suddenly improves.

Before the conclusion comes the matter of record keeping...

17 RECORD KEEPING

Having gone through the recruitment process, we will have made contact with a number of different candidates.

Keeping a record of them will enable us to consider good but unsuccessful applicants for other positions in future and allow us to refer to these records should someone subsequently reapply.

A good recruitment consultancy will keep such records as a matter of course.

This last stage of the process brings us to the conclusion...

18 CONCLUSION

To maximise the effectiveness of the recruitment process, the relationship between the client and the recruitment consultancy needs to be seamless.

Attention also needs to be given to all stages of the process as identified in this document. Together, this should help ensure that there are:

NO WEAK LINKS

19 APPENDICES

1. Example job specification

2. Example candidate specification

3. Different recruitment methods
- database search
- advertising
- direct mail
- search

4. Client training - Effective Interviewing

5. Example offer letter

6. Letter advising candidates of reference checking

Appendix 1
Example job specification

Group Finance Executive - Reporting & Analysis Team

Reporting to the Group Financial Controller, the primary responsibility is to provide senior management and operational managers with financial business information in the form of analyses, reports and presentations.

The role will involve close contact with all levels of management and an important part of the job will be to give financial input into all areas of planning - both production and strategic.

Objectives

To manage the following tasks to agreed deadlines, and to tailor them to the specific user requirements.

1. To produce an executive summary of key business indicators and detailed report with the following sections:

- group performance and statistics

- company financial results

- market share analysis

- revenue analysis

- other operating company analysis

- critical success factors for internal communications (quarterly)

- specific schedules of key activity for Press Office and Customer Services departments

2. To produce and organise monthly Board presentations (including speaker notes).

3. To be proactive in initiating and attending meetings with users of reports to establish detailed requirements.

4. To initiate and attend meetings with the IT department to develop reports to satisfy user requirements.

5. To automate routine procedures where possible with the use of macros, linked files etc.

6. To develop detailed revenue analysis.

7. To gain a detailed understanding of the company's business and strategic direction and to track competitive activity, in order to provide critical analysis.

8. To produce ad hoc reports and presentations as may be required (e.g. interims, year end, new ventures).

Appendix 2
Example person specification

Technical

- proven technical knowledge of financial accounting within the financial services sector

- must have a strong understanding of UK GAAP, and companies act and be aware of filing deadlines and recent changes within this area

- knowledge of company secretarial work would also be relevant

- knowledge of the firm's IT systems i.e. Excel, Word etc.

Personal:

- ability to create a process for dealing with accounting of subsidiary companies i.e. will be working with a clean sheet of paper

- strong project management skills: will be expected to schedule and agree the work to be done on the subsidiaries to ensure this meets deadlines

- ability to appreciate the 'bigger picture' rather than getting bogged down with the detail, as will be managing a number of assignments simultaneously

- proven people management skills, an ability to manage junior members of staff working at remote client locations

- strong interpersonal skills: will be negotiating staff availability with other audit managers, liaising with client staff

Required competencies:

- active listening

- controlling

- detail handling

- influencing

- planning and organising

- written standards

Appendix 3
Different recruitment methods

The recruitment methodologies most commonly used are:
1. Database search
2. Advertising
3. Direct mail
4. Search (headhunting)

Database search works best for relatively junior appointments or situations where the requirements are fairly general in nature. In such cases a database search might well reveal a shortlist of candidates currently looking for a new job which can be rigorously filtered before being submitted to the client. All candidates put forward by any Executive Connections group companies will have attended a registration interview with a consultant trained in competency based interviewing.

Advertising is particularly appropriate if the candidate population is large, widely spread, or where the mix of skills required could be found in individuals with varied backgrounds. In such cases we may need to cast the net wider to find the best candidates, with the advertising as the bait. The disadvantage of advertising can be the cost, although as a substantial buyer of advertising space, Executive Connections group enjoys significant volume discounts which we are happy to pass on to our clients. Furthermore, careful media selection can allow fairly precise targeting on either a regional or national basis. In addition to responses from candidates already seeking alternative employment, effective advertising often attracts inquiries from individuals who are not active in the job market on the basis that the individual is seeking a confidential, informal chat with an intermediary.

Direct mail enables direct communication with prospective candidates. Through a combination of Executive Connections group's in-house resources and the facilities offered by a number of the professional accounting institutes, we are able to target candidates by such criteria as age, stage of qualification and home address. Such an approach enables us to communicate significantly more information than can economically be contained in an advertisement, at costs which are often substantially less than those for advertising.

Search is normally recommended for either senior managerial or highly technical roles where there is a need to carefully target specific skills and proactively interest and attract a candidate. This requires top quality research and sensitive handling by the consultant. It also has the benefit of maintaining greater confidentiality through the recruitment process, such as might be necessary to avoid upsetting current employees.

N.B. Under certain circumstances, Executive Connections group may agree to undertake search activities for a client, but we will never target any of our clients' staff due to conflict of interest.

Appendix 4
Client training - Effective Interviewing

In partnership with a specialist training consultancy, Executive Connections group has produced a number of tailor made training courses for clients. The similarity of most Finance Managers' and HR specialists' requirements in respect of interviewing means that most companies opt for a half day course entitled *Effective Interviewing.*

Effective Interviewing is an informed, thought provoking and practically orientated course specifically tailored for those wishing to develop and improve selection interviewing techniques and skills.

Upon completion of this half day course delegates will be able to:

- avoid interview pitfalls

- establish the selection criteria

- conduct a structured interview

- assess candidates through effective questioning techniques

- sell their company and the position

Effective Interviewing can be conducted as an in house or public course by arrangement although due to the practical nature of the course the maximum number of delegates per course is six.

Appendix 5

Offer letters will always differ due to the specificity of the information they contain. Consequently the following example can only be a guide as to the way in which you might choose to make an offer:

JKL&Partners
Chartered Accountants
Audit House
Main Street
Reading Berks

Mr. L Candidate
32 Home Road
Chiswick East
Manchester
LP4 2RH

Dear Candidate (first name),

Further to our recent discussions, I am delighted to offer you a post with the company as a (position). You will be attached specifically to the (explanation of department or division if necessary) and will report to (name of direct boss). You will also report to me on a fortnightly basis for a period unlikely to exceed the first three months of your employment. This is purely to give me a chance to make sure you are able to fit in as quickly and smoothly as possible.

Your probationary period of employment is governed by the attached provisional contract and I should be grateful if, once you have read it, you could sign and return one copy to me by (date) with the Employee Record Form, also attached.

Your status with the company will be formally reviewed after three months, with a view to offering you a permanent contract of employment. At this point exceptional performance may also result in an increase in your remuneration.

Ancillary benefits in respect of private medical insurance and an interest free season ticket loan will be provided to you when your appointment with the company is confirmed.

I will be able to confirm your holiday entitlement for the period to 31st December once your start date with the company is agreed, but the calculation is 1 day for each complete month plus 2 days for each complete quarter plus 3 days to be taken over the Christmas to New Year period when the office is officially closed.

This offer is subject to the receipt of references which are satisfactory to the Company from (reference 1) to whom I would like your permission to speak and also from (reference 2) to whom I would like to write. It is also subject to sight of the documentation described in the attached induction checklist.

Should you have any questions, please give me a call. If you wish to call out of normal hours, my home number is (telephone) where you can catch me after 8pm

Finally, it only remains for me to speak on behalf of us all in saying how much we have enjoyed meeting with you at the various stages. We believe that we can offer you the training and development you are seeking, in addition to a long and rewarding career and very much look forward to welcoming you to the company.

Yours sincerely

Appendix 6
Letter advising candidates of reference checking

When a company makes a written offer of employment to a prospective employee, it is usually subject to references. As these references will normally include the current employer, they cannot be checked prior to the candidate's written acceptance of the offer and his or her resignation.

Once the candidate has resigned, the consultant should inform the client that they can now check references. This may be done by telephone or in writing. When requesting a written reference, it is customary to include a stamped addressed envelope for its return. It may also be appropriate to include a form asking for their observations on the candidate's honesty, timekeeping, attendance etc.

Once references have been checked, assuming they are positive, it is courteous to tell the candidate that they have been checked so that he or she can thank their referees. Here is an example of the type of letter which should be written.

RST HOLDINGS LIMITED
SUTTON HOUSE.CARNABY STREET.LONDON W1

Mr S Fenton
19 The Avenue
Clapham
London
SW12 8AU

Dear Candidate (first name),

Following our offer letter dated (date) I am writing to advise you that we have taken references, which were perfectly acceptable and can therefore now formally confirm our offer of employment to you.

(Reference 1) and (reference 2) were both very helpful. No doubt you will wish to thank both of them for their assistance.

We very much look forward to you joining us on (date), although I shall give you a call sometime next week to give you a better idea as to how your first few days are likely to shape up. In the meantime I have enclosed a rough induction plan as well as some hopefully useful information which we give to all new employees.

Once again, welcome on board!

Yours sincerely

EXECUTIVE CONNECTIONS
PERSONALLY RECOMMENDED

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Fax: 0171 304 9001

E-Mail: response@executive-connections.co.uk

ACCOUNTANCY CONNECTIONS
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