

How to avoid the recruitment agency horror stories

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Every industry has its deadbeats – but some manage to do an excellent job in giving everyone else a bad name. The recruitment industry is particularly prone to “bad apples” because of the fly-by-night nature of so many of the people who work there and the short-term focus of monthly targets.

In-house recruiter **Dan Nuroo** recently mused about why people hate recruitment agencies on his blog.

“I knew a guy who placed the same person into a permanent role three times in a year! Twice in the same company, just asked her to go by her maiden name the second time around so as to not raise suspicion,” he writes. “He made a fee each time upwards of \$20,000 (in the days of three month replacements), and would brag about it. I’ve heard of agents blatantly using their sexuality to try to get work to the point of offering ‘the full service’ for work.”

I had a boss, who actually told a young lady that she’d better go to the ladies to fix her dress as the straps kept falling off. ‘It’s not accidentally happening’, he was told. (True story).”

Speaking to *BRW*, Nuroo (who has worked in-house and in agencies) says he has also known agents to threaten to “empty the car park” – poach all the staff – if a company refused to use their services.

Indeed, I have seen a similar response online from a recruiter complaining about IT company Atlassian’s restrictive contracts for recruitment agencies.

Nuroo, who is general manager of recruitment at IMA Management and Technology, is not anti-agency but is warning employers to be careful about the agencies they use and to think about what they want from them.

“There’s a few bad apples,” he says.

He says he would not use agencies for his day-to-day hiring, because that is his job. Where he does use them is for “different” roles, for sectors of the market where the company doesn’t have expertise or the network.

“That is my core business, that’s where we should be spending most of our time and money. If I used agencies for this, then why would my company pay my salary?” he says.

“Where there is a speed-to-fill urgency, why wouldn’t I use an agency?”

“If you’re smart, you can also get a fair bit of industry knowledge from your recruiter (if they are any good). I have in the past felt a little insular, a little blinkered to the wider market when sitting in an in-house role, my focus (rightly or wrongly) being on my company alone.”

Agencies to watch out for are those with a short-term focus, that “churn and burn” their staff. If the recruiter hasn’t been around for long, they won’t have the network for clients to tap into.

Another warning sign is when candidates turn up for the interview and say they never met anyone from the recruitment agency.

“I almost measure people’s time in recruitment in dog years. Five years in a recruitment agency is like 35 in the rest of the world,” Nuroo says.

Nuroo remembers working at an agency where he received an “employee of the month” award one month for earning \$100,000, and then got a written warning the following month because he didn’t “make his numbers”.

“If they haven’t made their numbers in the first three months . . . they would be gone”, he says. “A lot of the bad practices come from pressure to get the numbers – it is such a numbers-driven environment.”

Recruitment agencies may make anywhere from 10 per cent to 30 per cent of a candidate’s annual salary (depending on the difficulty of sourcing) and about one-third of the fee goes to the agent, on top of their base salary, which is generally in the range of \$30,000 to \$60,000.

“I remember getting into trouble once for going out to meet people face-to-face,” Nuroo says.

Employers should listen to the feedback from the candidates to get a better idea of the quality of service from the agency.

Agencies that “flip” resumes and just fill up your email inbox don’t provide value, no matter how much they cut their fees, he says.

He has also been burnt as an in-house recruiter by watching an agent advertise a job on LinkedIn – after promising him that he already had the candidates for him to see.

While good recruiters are worth their weight in gold, bad ones are a nightmare. And, to get an idea of how bad they can get, a post on a Whirlpool forum, by someone claiming to be a former recruiter, is enough to make the hairs rise on the back of your neck. (If you have a weak stomach and low tolerance for poor attitude and bad language, don’t click though).

“Ninety per cent of the jobs are “FAKE”!!!”, he says of internet advertising.

“This is also the reason why they don’t disclose the client’s name over the phone (not due to confidentiality . . . but rather, there is no client . . . seriously think about it). The advert is designed to promote the perfect job with excessively high salaries. This obviously acts as a net for attracting candidates. You meet with the consultant, who will then reduce your salary expectations and gains your permission to ‘float’ your resume to various organisation on their database.”

