

A stylized illustration of a person in a suit shouting into a megaphone, rendered in a semi-transparent red color against a solid red background.

Identifying Real Job Orders: Part 1

Qualifying Hiring Managers to Save Time

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Introduction: Invest the Time Now - Huge Dividends Later

Job orders have always been valuable. That's not news. But as the economy continues to waver and hiring continues to fall, job orders have become more than valuable – they've become a precious commodity. Although the ongoing drop in job orders is concerning, that's not the biggest challenge facing many recruiters today. The biggest challenge for many recruiters now is being able to separate the wheat from the chaff among the job orders that are out there – knowing how to quickly tell the difference between a job order that's genuine and one that's not.

The bottom line today is that as a recruiter, you need to focus more of your time and resources on qualifying job orders so you can spend less time chasing orders that will never come to fruition. That's the biggest piece of advice from Jason Davis, better known to many as "Slouch" the founder of RecruitingBlogs.com, and Dan Fisher, a recognized sales coach and consultant who founded the Menemsha Group. The two recruiting industry veterans recently spoke to Bullhorn and shared their insights to help recruiters focus their efforts on work that will lead to hires and, ultimately, to fees for the recruiter. "As a recruiter, you want to know that if you spend your time, you are going to get paid," Davis said.

In bad times, you need to spend more time uncovering the "why" of job orders, not just the "what." Fisher put it this way: "When the economy is good, clients will pick up the phone, call a staffing agency and say they need a Java developer, and the staffing firm will take it at face value. If times are good, the staffing agency assumes the job order is real. They don't take the time to qualify it. Sales people probably assume the client is hiring a Java developer because they're short-staffed on a project. But if you dig deeper, there's always a much more compelling reason for filling a job than merely filling an empty seat. In good times, the deeper reason doesn't matter – there are plenty of orders and relatively fewer candidates. In bad times, finding the business case for the hire – making sure the order is real – well, that's a must."

In the first of this two-part report, Bullhorn will show you how to qualify job orders using your recruiting savvy and technology to enhance your success. In this first installment, Bullhorn shares some of the valuable insights from Davis and Fisher about how to qualify job orders effectively and recognize the real ones.

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Invest the time up front and ask the right questions

Getting hiring managers to invest their time up front is the single most effective method a recruiter can use in order to identify a real job order. Davis recommends that to minimize risk, you should have a client commit to giving an hour of his or her own time over two sessions to write the job order.

Simply asking a client to invest this kind of time up front gives you the opportunity to see how the prospect responds to the request, which can really help you get to the heart of the matter. “How the hiring manager responds to being asked to spend time writing the order with the recruiter can raise some red flags and lead the discussion into a whole other set of questions to explore,” said Fisher.

Similarly, Davis advises recruiters to be absolutely clear at the start of a conversation that the goal is to write a job order and really get your feet wet, not just stick a toe in the water. But that doesn't mean at this stage – and in this economy – you should try to single-mindedly guide the hiring manager toward a sale. True, the art of persuasion is an absolutely essential skill for any successful recruiter. But, at this phase of the sales process, applying that talent could actually hurt you in the bigger picture.

“If you persuade someone who is not really a buyer to go ahead and buy, all you end up doing is spending useless time with them,” said Davis. Your time would probably be better spent encouraging the hiring manager not to pull the trigger, even if it means not making a sale. “It's almost like you need to talk them out of the job order and convince them they don't need to hire,” Fisher said. Unfortunately, that's not the typical case, often because the recruiter isn't facing reality – the reality of what is truly the best use of his or her time.

“Often times, I don't think recruiters are being honest with themselves,” Fisher said. “When recruiters get a job order, they want to start working on it. They're afraid to ask the questions to qualify the order, because if they ask those questions they may find out that the order isn't qualified. Then, they are back to making more sales calls. So they trick themselves into working job orders that aren't real.”

For the contingency recruiter, time is an even more precious asset, and wasting it is undeniably the greatest risk to success. In an economy where recruiters are spending more time working both sides of the desk, working efficiently is more than just a best practice, it's a critical skill to master.

“If the hiring manager isn't going to pay me to do the initial work – write the job order – I may do it anyway because the upside is huge,” Davis said. “But even in those cases, I need to know there is more to this than them just saying that they need help. I need to know – I need to believe – that they will buy, not that they just need my help along the way.”

Davis and Fisher both said that one way to both assess the level of commitment of a hiring manager and indirectly heighten the gravity of the order is to recommend a follow-up interview the next day. Requesting that you do an interview the next day creates a sense of urgency in the process that the hiring manager may not have (compared with scheduling a call for few days later, for example). Also, proposing a second interview gives you a further opportunity to evaluate the hiring manager's intent to buy.

What are some good questions to ask the hiring manager to qualify a job order?

- How long has the job been open?
- How many resumes have you seen?
- How many people have you interviewed?

“If the hiring manager replies with, ‘Yes, I’d love to talk to you tomorrow,’ that’s good news for you, obviously,” Davis said. “And that is, in fact, how I can do my job really, really well—by taking the time to do a good order over two days. But you know what’s really interesting? Most hiring managers that I talk to say, ‘Can we just get it done today?’”

“At that point, you have the opportunity to dig a little deeper into why they’d rather finish the job that day, which gets you back on track to determining what their true need is and if the order is real,” Davis said.

“This process sounds like it’s time-consuming, but it can actually be as short as 10 minutes if you know what you’re looking for going in to the process,” Fisher said. “You need to qualify the hiring manager. You need to set expectations for the sales process.”

By just spending a few minutes on this task, you can save yourself hours of time on an order that is potentially worthless; or even worse, is a total waste of your time.

Understand the hiring manager’s motivation

What you’re ultimately doing as a recruiter is solving problems for your clients. Usually, these problems are significant – otherwise the company wouldn’t be paying recruiter fees to fill a position. As part of understanding whether a job order is real, Davis and Fisher both urge recruiters to understand the specific business problem they are helping a client solve.

“Let’s say you ask what kind of problem this open position is causing, and the hiring manager says, ‘I didn’t get my bonus last quarter because we weren’t able to deliver on something, and we need this person to deliver on it,’” Davis said. “A bell should start ringing in your head. You know this guy wants his bonus next year. That’s a very real problem that you can help him find a solution for. In fact, he may even relax his expectations to get that bonus.”

“If they can’t convince me that there’s a lot on the line,” Fisher said, “that just tells me the job order isn’t real. I know that if they can’t convince me, they probably can’t convince their boss to get their budget approved.”

After you understand the motivation, you can begin narrowing the focus of the conversation and determine if the client is really motivated to hire and whether or not you can fill the position. You need to know the hiring manager’s short-term expectations, long-term expectations, and whether the client is looking for someone to come in and fix something that can’t be fixed.

Recruiters should also remember that what a hiring manager says often isn’t as revealing as how they say it. Although it is important to ask the right questions, you still need to listen carefully and

How Could They Mislead Me Like That?

Unfortunately, there are many reasons a hiring manager might give you a job order that might lead nowhere:

- Getting you off the phone.
- Window-shopping with the idea of hiring if a superstar is recruited.
- Snooping on the competition.
- Trying to network with colleagues without leaving their office.
- Thinking a contract won’t be awarded, but wanting to have qualified candidates available if it is.
- Looking for a job and wanting to draw you into presenting them.

Source: Fordyce Letter. How To Spot Hiring Authorities With Higher Priorities. <http://www.fordyceletter.com/2004/07/01/how-to-spot-hiring-authorities-with-higher-priorities/>

develop your intuition. “After asking all of these questions and hearing their feedback and how they respond, I can collectively make an intelligent decision based on facts and instincts and determine whether a job order is real or not,” Fisher said.

Learn the hiring manager’s motivation and you’ll uncover more clues to help determine if you have a real job order or if they are just spinning your wheels.

Qualify the hiring process

The next opportunity to assess whether an order is real is not necessarily obtaining the job description itself, but getting a hiring manager to explain the hiring process in detail – explaining the mechanics of each step, from interview to selection to hiring.

If the hiring manager can explain the process to you in detail, chances are good that he or she is committed to filling the position and will follow through to the end and actually make a hire. If not, chances are equally good that the hiring manager is merely kicking the tires. Be prepared to move on.

You should assess the hiring manager’s expectations for the process, then establish each step that will lead to the eventual hire. Failing to understand and account for these benchmarks up front will mean lost time and, potentially, lost fees later.

“Most recruiters will ask one or two questions about the process but will assume too many other points,” Fisher said. “Many sales people forget there are approvals they need to get and steps they need to follow internally.”

Make no assumptions. Ask specific questions about how each step of the hiring process will unfold and get clear answers.

What are some good questions to ask to qualify the hiring process?

- What is the budget for the position?
- Has hiring for the position been approved?
- Do you have a purchase order for the position?
- Will human resources be involved in the hiring process?

Recognize that fee resistance may mean you are talking to the wrong person

In a down economy, resistance to fees is a matter of course. Some hiring managers believe they are negotiating from a position of strength. However, fee resistance may also reveal that you are in fact wasting your time talking to the wrong person.

“The standard fees for a retained search were not picked out of a hat,” Davis said. “These are numbers based on how difficult it is to find the right person and hire them. When you talk to a company and they say to you they only pay 20 percent fees, ask them if they ever pay more. Ask them if when they need to hire at the executive level – and they bring in Korn/Ferry or Spencer Stuart or Heidrick & Struggles – are they paying 20 percent? They’ll say no. Because at those levels, they pay bigger fees.”

When you know the company pays bigger fees, you also know the person you're talking to is not really in the position to authorize the higher commission.

The difference between a 25 percent fee and a 20 percent fee is not 5 percent: it's much more significant than that," Davis said. "This is not the time to work twice as hard to make less money." Investing the time and effort to find and talk to the right person is critical.

Make Sure Your CRM Reflects Your Effort

What you keep out of your CRM is as important as what you include. Now that you are putting in the extra effort to find only qualified hiring managers – managers in a position to actually pull the trigger on a hire – you should never, ever waste your time adding unqualified hiring managers into your CRM. Unfortunately, too many recruiters do just that. It's often the result of wanting to build a good pipeline. As with moving toward a sale before qualifying an order, it's an error in judgment that means wasted time later.

"A lot of recruiters will find someone who looks like a hiring manager on LinkedIn and put their information in the CRM, planning to follow up with them later," Fisher said. "When the recruiter finally gets in touch with the person two months later, or whenever, you find out that you really need to be working with someone else in the organization. They're trying to build a pipeline, but they end up building a database of unqualified clients – and then they wonder why they aren't making any money."

To qualify hiring managers for inclusion in your CRM, set clear standards for your clients. When assessing whether a hiring manager truly intends to hire a position, some recruiters draw a very specific line in the sand that the client must cross before the recruiter will move forward. Examples of bright lines some recruiters include: not working for any assignment with a fee under 25 percent or \$25,000; not taking on a contingent assignment unless it's exclusive; and not beginning a search without an up-front engagement fee. Regardless of your criteria, establishing and maintaining clear standards for your clients is essential.

After you have qualified a hiring manager and begin working the job order, make sure that their status in your CRM is different than an active client that you are not currently working a job order for. You need to be able to quickly differentiate these hiring managers and generate separate call lists for these groups to make your processes even more efficient.

Conclusion: Find Business Pains and You'll Find Job Orders

A proper, real job order is a tangible, viable and valuable commodity. It is, after all, your single product. And real job orders evolve from your relationship with the hiring manager.

Recruiting is in fact all about relationships, asking good questions and finding the business pain. "Recruiters need to learn to seek out business pains, not job orders," Fisher said. "When they seek out job orders, all they are is an order taker. There's not a lot of value in that conversation."

If you qualify the business pain, the hiring manager and the hiring process, you will qualify the job order.

But that's not the end of the process. In Part 2 of this report, we'll discuss how to use technology to enhance your success, including tools for:

- Documenting thoroughly and reconfirming your understanding throughout the process.
- Identifying metrics to guide you to success.
- Managing milestones to capture requirements.
- Using candidates to find job orders.

About Jason Davis

Jason Davis, better known to many as “Slouch” at RecruitingBlogs.com, spends his days thinking about how to make his site the best social network for recruiters. Davis started recruiting in 1993 and from 1997 until 2006 ran a search firm in the semiconductor industry. Davis currently runs RecruitingBlogs.com, partners in jobboarders.com, a social network for the job board industry, and is very active in buying and developing recruiting and job-related domain names. Jason recently launched Splits.org, a Twitter-based recruiting system for recruiters looking to identify other recruiters to do splits.

About Dan Fisher

Dan Fisher is founder of the Menemsha Group and author of the MenemshaMethodology, the only proprietary sales methodology designed exclusively for IT staffing sales professionals. Dan spent 13 years in sales and sales leadership roles within the IT services and software industry and now provides sales coaching and consulting. Dan can be reached at dan@menemshagroup.com.

About Bullhorn, Inc.

Bullhorn is the global leader in On Demand, front office staffing and recruiting software, providing the only completely integrated front office solution for staffing and recruiting firms. Bullhorn's customers achieve the highest placement rates in the industry. By enabling recruiting, sales and management to live and work together, Bullhorn synchronizes sales and recruiting to generate, source and fill job orders in real-time, at anytime and from anyplace. Delivered through software as a service, Bullhorn continually meets the evolving business needs of its customers. More than 1,400 firms and 14,000 users worldwide, including some of the largest global staffing firms, partner with Bullhorn to meet the employment demands of the global economy.

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