

# How to get the best from a headhunter

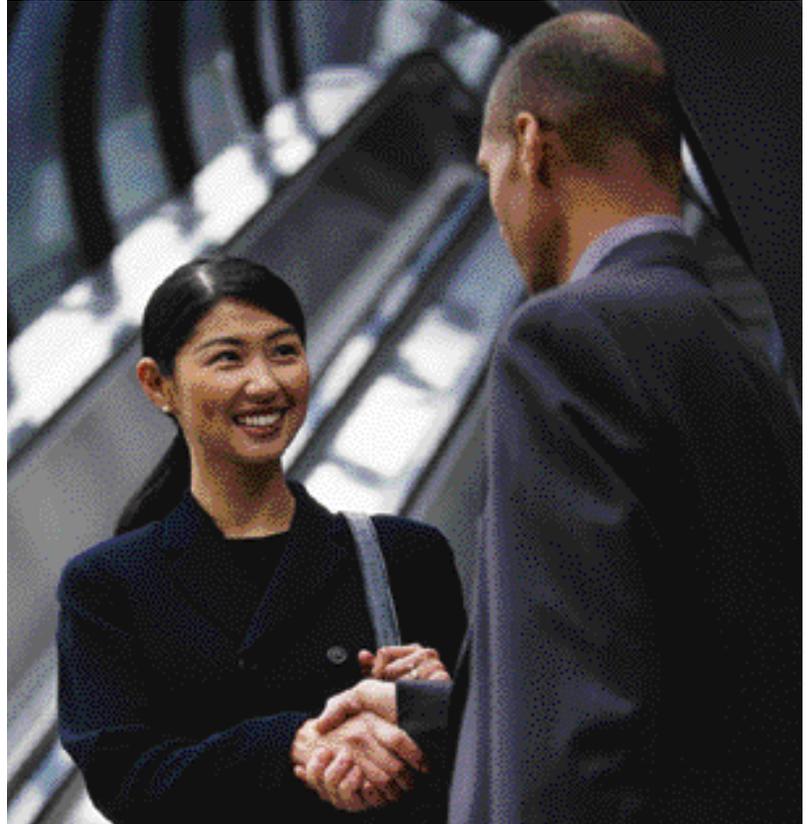
**Beverly Nazmi** **Alongside the big players, a lot of job growth, where openings leading to partnerships and directorships are being created, is in the small to medium sized organisations.**

**S**earching out the best senior creative and managerial talent around takes time, a luxury that companies seldom have. Executive search firms, or headhunters, are frequently used as the most effective way of spearheading the recruitment drive for high level positions. If you are called by a headhunter, you've been identified as a possible 'fit'. Some people never get such a call during their entire career, which is not necessarily a reflection of a lack of talent.

Others are approached on a regular basis. The key to becoming sought after, if that's what you want, is to be both excellent at what you do, and visible within the industry. Switched-on people use contact with headhunters to their own advantage.

Having an executive search firm call you is one of the best ways of finding a better job while you are employed, taking little effort from you. In fact, you've nothing to lose and everything to gain. As the whole process is extremely confidential, your current position will not be at risk. Even if you're happy in your current role, being approached is a great opportunity for you to check how marketable you are. Because an executive search team has to keep up to date with both current and future industry trends, use the initial approach as a benchmarking exercise to see if there's greater opportunity out there.

Generally appointed by companies that are serious about their cultural reinforcement and market standing, a competent headhunter will look for



talent to not only support the employer today, but also as it reacts to changing trading conditions in the future.

On many an occasion, the headhunter is contributing towards the creation of 'super groups' of intellectual capital and experience. Be careful though. If you do get invited to an initial meeting to discuss your career plans and a possible opening, it's not a good idea to charge ahead blindly. Check for yourself the reputation of the executive search organisation. Just as in every other field, there are a few headhunting firms out there who may not be quite as credible and professional as others. Be confident about both the firm and individual that approached you, before you place your career in their hands. Association with a firm that is not highly thought of may not help your career prospects.

A good executive search organisation will welcome the opportunity to present its pedigree and provide references. Companies generally pay headhunters a

percentage of a candidate's first year's remuneration package for their efforts in attracting top talent. You should expect to be treated both professionally and ethically. If you feel this is not the case, sever the relationship. Your first meeting will be to discuss your suitability for the position in mind. The relationship might go no further for that particular job.

A good executive search professional will not put you forward to their client unless they really think that you can offer the skills needed to help the client succeed, even though they only earn their complete fee when a job offer is made and accepted. Headhunters will not want to waste your time or their clients (risking their own reputation with both parties) and should certainly not put you under any pressure to take the new position. A professional headhunter should never tell you who else is in the running for a job. If they do, they have blown their confidentiality responsibility wide open. Again, end the relationship and never use that firm if you need a



search done in the future. Use that initial meeting to find out about the company looking for new senior staff, not just about the job itself.

A good executive search professional will give you detailed insight into the company, as well as the current job market. It's the headhunter's business to know this stuff, so go into as much detail as you need. Equally, be prepared for the executive search professional to drill into your professional life, personal drivers and lifestyle expectations.

A meeting to discuss one opportunity could open up different future avenues. The successful headhunter that is truly trusted and effective is likely to have other non-

advertised, senior positions to fill. Knowing your characteristics and long-term ambitions, the headhunter should be able to help you move position, better enabling you to achieve your potential and goals five or ten years down the line.

If an executive search firm knows that you exist and has knowledge of your skills, aspirations and notice availability, they will also know what kind of opportunity will suit you best, when it comes along. And remember, as a candidate, the headhunter won't be charging you a fee! In these days of talent scarcity it's likely that high performers will eventually get approached by headhunters.

However, employers are unlikely to

let talent disappear without a fight. For those offered golden handcuffs, instant promotion or a large salary increase, think twice. It shouldn't take a threat to leave to get the new conditions. Although you didn't ask the headhunter to approach you, don't be tempted to go through the complete process with the intention of using the new offer to negotiate with your existing employer. What goes around comes around – it's a rapidly shrinking world!



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