

# What Not To Do When Seeking Highly Skilled Contingents

And that means trying to have it all

By Tom Kosnik

**W**hen it comes to finding highly skilled contingent labor, knowing what not to do can be just as important as knowing what to do. We know that the traditional methods of acquiring contingent labor in a tight labor market are sometimes ineffective. We also know that something new, something innovative, has to be added to the traditional methods in order for us to accomplish the acquisition strategy.

At times, companies proceed with a totally new and innovative approach to acquiring highly skilled contingent labor. As good as many of these may appear, they also have weaknesses that can hinder success. So, knowing what not to do can make all the difference between failure and success.

## Avoid the Black Box

Suppliers call an account a "black box" when buyers of human resources have a vendor management system in place that allows for no contact between hiring managers and staffing suppliers. This system, in its most rigid form, is ineffective when it comes to recruiting highly skill contingent employees.

One reason held to implement a black-box scenario is to increase the hiring manager's focus time. Limiting their contact with staffing suppliers supposedly allows hiring managers to concentrate on reviewing resumes. However, such constraints actually can decrease

managers' focus and cause them to spend more time in the interviewing and hiring process. When it comes to highly skilled contingent labor, most requirements carry with them nuances that can only be discovered through a direct conversation with the hiring manager. Additionally, the cultural environment into which someone will be hired is rarely or poorly communicated.

Furthermore, hiring managers in today's corporate world always have numerous other responsibilities, often as hands-on contributors. To improve the system, simply allow for limited contact between staffing suppliers and hiring managers. When it comes to acquiring highly skilled contingent workers, limited contact is necessary for success.

Another reason cited to implement a black box scenario is to give all suppliers an equal shot at fulfilling

requirements. Yet not all vendors are equally qualified. All staffing vendors have specific skill sets in which they are best at recruiting. A brief analysis will disclose the kinds and quality of people each can deliver.

Allocating all requirements to all staffing suppliers that are fulfilling orders for highly skilled contingent workers does not work. A more effective method is to allocate certain requirements to suppliers in their area of

## HR Roadblocks

Staffing suppliers can at times run into roadblocks within the human resources department. It is common for internal corporate recruiters to view external staffing suppliers as a threat to their jobs. It is also common for HR people to distrust staffing suppliers. We have all experienced recruiters as well as staffing suppliers with questionable ethics. However, it benefits no one to automatically assume the worst.

To improve working relationships with staffing suppliers, HR departments must make an effort to establish trust with staffing suppliers. One approach involves visiting top staffing suppliers. The goals of such visits are numerous. HR people will want to learn the fulfillment capabilities of the vendors. They will also want to make subsequent visits to solve problems as well as

generate creative responses to fulfillment challenges. Ultimately, the goal is to establish a long-lasting and respectful working relationship, something that cannot happen without a concerted effort.

Another helpful approach to establishing and maintain-



core competencies. For example, only those holding a competency in recruiting PeopleSoft contingent workers will get the PeopleSoft job orders. As a result, the staffing suppliers will have an increased success rate in recruiting for your company.

ing healthy relationships is to have a "vendor liaison" on staff who is tasked with developing and maintaining communications with the staffing suppliers.

This person is not a corporate recruiter or an auditor from the purchasing department, but an employee who helps untangle specific fulfillment challenges. This may require work to insure that all hiring managers fully know the capabilities of each staffing supplier. It may require assistance and follow-up on specific requirements that are staying open for an unreasonable amount of time. A vendor liaison can improve supplier relationships greatly.

### **Metrics**

Staffing suppliers are accustomed to myriad performance metrics. They typically know it takes 10 interviews to get three qualified candidates to a hiring manager. The better vendors will know how many phone calls and emails it will take to obtain those 10 interviews.

Buyers of skilled contingent labor at times create their own metrics that are not aligned with fulfillment processes and benchmarks standard in the staffing industry. Some companies, for example, require that all IT staffing suppliers submit resumes on all IT job requirements in order to stay on the vendors list. The goal of such a requirement is prevent ven-

dors from cherry-picking certain job requirements. But the result is staffing suppliers submitting unqualified resumes just to hit the metric. We know it does not work.

To improve a benchmarks-driven program, the metrics must be based on what an organization needs to accomplish as well as staffing industry standards. An either-or approach is a serious roadblock to success and will create inefficiency.

Include staffing suppliers in setting such performance metrics, especially when they offer highly skilled contingent labor. Suppliers know what is realistic. Metrics are critical to success. Everyone on both sides of the fence can agree to

this concept. The art of developing and choosing the right metrics is the notion that can improve success quite a bit.

Many of the newer approaches to finding skilled contingent labor are quite good and are moving in the right direction. But they are dynamic and in flux. Vendor management systems, establishing trusting relationships and agreed-on metrics are here to stay. Knowing how and where to tweak these elements can make all the difference in the world. ●

---

Tom Kosnik is a certified organizational development consultant. He specializes in the area of human capital management. He can be reached at [tkosnik@visus.us](mailto:tkosnik@visus.us).