

## *A View from the Other Side*

### From Recruiting Coordinator to Search Consultant

Over the past few months, a number of people have asked me "Why did you do it?" and "What is it like to be on the 'other side'?"

Why would any recruiting coordinator become a search consultant? I viewed the transition from recruiting for a large law firm to recruiting for a national search firm as the next logical step in my career. [As a recruiting coordinator, I very much enjoyed the fact that every fall brought a new group of young people with motivations, desires, and career goals.](#) Helping those young people attain those goals was what kept me in the profession. Similarly, it is what attracted me to recruiting for BCG.

I would like to share with you some of the perceptions I had of search firms when I was a recruiting coordinator, some of the challenges I am now facing as a search consultant, my reasons for choosing to work for BCG, and the potential risks I have taken and the rewards I hope to achieve in making this transition.

### I. As a Recruiting Coordinator, What Was My Perception of Search Firms?

Most recruiting coordinators will probably tell you that dealing with search consultants is a "necessary evil" of their profession. To be candid, when I was a recruiting coordinator, I either liked dealing with search firms or hated dealing with them. The select group of firms I liked dealing with I called upon on a regular basis. They had fairly similar characteristics.

#### A. What were the characteristics of search firms with whom I wanted to work?

**They were straightforward and honest.** I like dealing with people who are honest and accurately represent the facts. I liked working with search consultants who were honest about their candidates, accurately represented their employment histories, and were attempting to make a good match for their candidates and our law firm.

**They helped me meet my goals.** As a recruiting coordinator, I viewed search consultants as the means by which I could effectively deliver high-quality lateral candidates to the partners in my law firm. As long as they assisted me in meeting that primary goal, I was happy to engage their services. But there were other ways in which search consultants were helpful. They could provide me information regarding hiring trends in the [legal market](#), [senior associate](#) and partner-level compensation structures, and policies at other law firms. So there were definite advantages to developing good relationships with search consultants.

**They knew their candidates.** The most reliable search firms know their candidates. On a weekly basis, I was faced with hundreds of resumes to review and did not have the time to ask the questions about every lateral candidate that should have been asked and answered directly in writing by the consultant representing them. If my law firm was going to engage the services of a search consultant, I felt the search consultant should have taken the time to get to know and aggressively represent the candidate.

**They effectively profiled the candidates with whom they worked.** I was particularly pleased to work with firms that took the time to answer in a cover letter all of the issues I would have raised regarding a particular candidate's resume, i.e., academic performance, reasons for leaving his/her prior employer(s), reasons for gaps in employment, how the candidate performed at his/her employer(s)-anything that would be relevant to my firm's hiring of the candidate. It also helped to receive information not reflected on the resume to further assess the candidates' strengths, qualifications, and overall competency.

**They were familiar with and adhered to my law firm's hiring guidelines.** It was vital to the successful placement of a candidate with my firm that the search consultant understood what my law firm was looking for. I was impressed when a search consultant took the time to ask me about our firm's hiring criteria, a particular practice group's composition, or other general information about my firm. Educating a search firm about these things can only improve the process and is a great, inexpensive way to market one's law firm to prospective lateral candidates.

**They delivered highly qualified candidates.** Search firms that consistently represented highly qualified candidates were the search firms I called when I had an opening.

## **B. What were characteristics of search firms with whom I did *not* want to work?**

**They did not conduct themselves in an ethical manner.** This could include anything from misrepresenting a candidate's qualifications or employment history to not adhering to the terms of a fee agreement.

**They did not take the time to get to know my law firm or my firm's hiring guidelines.** I was not interested in working with search firms that consistently faxed resumes of candidates that did not meet my firm's hiring guidelines. This led me to believe that they had not taken the time to get to know my firm and were casual in their approach to the process.

**They did not know their candidates and were not able to answer basic questions about them.** As a recruiting coordinator, I was surprised when a search firm could not answer very basic questions about a candidate's employment history. In fact, I was surprised when I received a resume without an accompanying letter detailing a candidate's experience and other relevant information. After all, anyone can fax a resume. If this information was not included with a submission, I was led to believe that the search firm had not taken the time to interview the candidate and did not care enough about the candidate or my law firm to do a thorough job. It also meant that I would have to take extra time out of my already busy day to call the search firm and get the information-to essentially do the search firm's job.

**They expected a fee that was based on a candidate's salary and bonus.**

When I was a recruiting coordinator, I thought it was presumptuous for any search firm to expect to receive a fee based both on the candidate's salary and bonus. I still believe it is presumptuous and don't think a candidate's bonus should be included in any fee arrangement.

**They did not adhere to the terms of fee agreements and generally accepted rules of the profession.** As a recruiting coordinator, I often scrutinized any fee agreement I received from a search firm to ensure that my firm's best interests were protected. When a search firm makes representations in its own fee agreement or signs off on a law firm's fee agreement, it should adhere to the terms. While I was acting as a recruiting coordinator, a renowned search firm I dealt with refused to refund a portion of the fee when an associate we hired through the search firm left my law firm within a six-month period. The language in the fee agreement was very straightforward, yet the search firm left it open to its interpretation of the language and refused to refund the fee. This was unprofessional and unethical and forever changed my view of that particular search firm and the manner in which it conducted business.

**They submitted associate resumes directly to attorneys in my firm without submitting a copy to me.** One of the daunting tasks of recruiting coordinators is to keep track of resumes received by their law firms, particularly those submitted through search firms. As a recruiting coordinator, I did not appreciate search consultants submitting associate resumes directly to attorneys in my law firm. It impeded my ability to effectively administer the process, keep accurate records, and ensure that our firm was not later dragged into a fee-dispute situation. As a search consultant, when

representing associates to law firms, I always try to keep recruiting professionals informed.

**Misrepresenting a candidate's qualifications and employment history or not disclosing information that would affect a firm's decision to hire a candidate.**

## II. What are the challenges I face as a search consultant?

As a search consultant for BCG, I face many challenges, not the least of which include identifying qualified candidates, gaining knowledge of law firms and new markets, and effectively matching candidates with the right law firms.

**Trying to determine if a candidate is a good fit for a particular law firm.**

BCG consultants and staff allocate an enormous amount of time and resources to researching law firms. We also spend a lot of time contacting recruiting coordinators to determine what their needs are and how we can better service them. These tasks require a lot of time, but are essential to the successful, long-term placement of candidates.

**Educating candidates about law firms and helping them overcome preconceived notions they may have about particular firms.** On a daily basis, I deal with candidates that will not consider interviewing with particular firms because of things they have heard through peers or through the legal grapevine. Individuals flourish in different environments. It is important as a search consultant to be able to distinguish between law firms, provide candidates with as many opportunities as possible, encourage them to look past their preconceived notions to meet with a variety of firms, and to ultimately assist them in determining where they might best fit in.

**Educating law firms about candidates.** One of my challenges as a search consultant is to provide as much information to law firms about my candidates as I possibly can. Harrison Barnes, President and founder of BCG, once remarked, "If you can't write at least three to four pages about a candidate with whom you are working, then you obviously don't know the candidate very well." Profiling candidates is crucial to the accurate and successful representation of any candidate. Our profiles have been very well received by recruiting coordinators and hiring partners nationwide, and I believe they are a good example of how BCG has sought to improve the lateral-hiring process.

**Servicing the candidate *and* the law firm-trying to make a good match.**

Although as a search consultant, I represent the candidate, it is my goal to also represent the interests of the law firm. It is impossible to make a good match without doing both. This requires me to serve as a mediator between the candidate and the law firm, bringing the parties together for a successful alliance. I spend an enormous amount of time each day attempting to understand what particular firms are looking for, their hiring criteria, and their specific lateral-hiring needs.

**Attracting and Delivering the Stars.** Not unlike my goal as a recruiting coordinator, my goal as a search consultant is to deliver the best talent to law firms. BCG consultants represent approximately 3-5% of the total number of candidates who contact us, and our representation of those candidates comes only after a crucial and time-consuming screening process.

**Getting personally involved in candidates' lives.** As I stated earlier, one of the primary reasons I felt comfortable making this transition was that I knew I would be able to continue to have a positive influence on candidates' lives and the lateral-hiring process generally. I have been able to do that. In fact, approximately 40% of my time is spent listening to candidates' fears, motivations, and concerns about providing for their families and counseling them regarding achieving their career goals.

**Fee Agreements.** As a search consultant, I have encountered law firms that will not look at resumes from search firms that are not on their approved list. I believed as a recruiting coordinator, and still believe, that limiting the pool of candidates from which a law firm can choose inhibits a law firm's ability to attract the

best and brightest talent. I believe it is imperative that recruiting professionals be open to at least reviewing resumes from search firms not on their approved list and that search firms should be willing to sign off on fee agreements required by law firms.

## **Trying to work through the lateral administrative processes of law firms.**

Law firm procedures can either enhance or inhibit the lateral-hiring process. Recruiting coordinators face a number of obstacles trying to work through the administrative processes in law firms, and it can sometimes be unnerving. The politics, procedures, lack of candidate profiling, scheduling and rescheduling, slow decision making, and delays can be very frustrating for recruiting coordinators, who work hard to achieve their hiring goals. Search consultants experience similar frustrations. It is not uncommon to have a candidate interview at a law firm, receive praise and adoration from the firm, and then receive no word, sometimes for weeks, as to how the firm intends to proceed. Unfortunately, sometimes this "slow to the draw" approach makes what would have otherwise been a pleasant alliance a distasteful misunderstanding, and the candidate is often left feeling discouraged and unwanted. Conversely, firms who are most effective in their recruiting efforts are quick to move on highly qualified candidates and are just as timely with their decision to hire or pass on a particular candidate. These are the firms that attract and are able to effectively recruit the best talent.

## **Overcoming the perception on the part of recruiting coordinators that all search firms' goals and motivations are the same.**

Just as no two law firms are alike, likewise, search firms are vastly different in their approaches to the process and their motivations. I chose BCG because I believe its approach is the most professional, effective, and progressive I have encountered. (See my discussion later about why I chose BCG.)

**Law firms not adhering to the Rules of the Profession.** As a recruiting coordinator, I often complained about search firms that did not act professionally or adhere to commonly accepted professional rules of conduct. It has been interesting being on the other side of the transaction and encountering law firms that do not adhere to those rules. For example, it is commonly accepted by law firms and search consultants that once a candidate is submitted through a search firm, for a period of at least six months thereafter, if the law firm interviews and hires the candidate, a fee is due and owing to the search firm. Surprisingly, there are firms that do not adhere to this commonly accepted approach. So it appears that there are legitimate complaints to be made on both sides of the transaction!

## **III. Why did I choose to work for BCG?**

Leaving Hopkins & Sutter (now Foley & Lardner) was certainly a very difficult decision. I had been at the firm for 20 years and had established very strong personal and professional relationships. One of the reasons I stayed at Hopkins & Sutter so long was because it had a reputation for demanding a very high standard and quality of work. I hoped to be able to translate that same quality experience to the search-firm environment.

I am happy to say that I have been able to do so at BCG. I first encountered BCG through a letter I received from its CEO and founder, Harrison Barnes. I remember being astounded by BCG's approach to the lateral process-and later found that Harrison's personal story about starting the firm was even more compelling. While searching for a job himself, Harrison found that most of the search firms he dealt with failed in two primary respects: 1) They did not care about their candidates, and 2) they did not have an understanding of and care about the law firms they were servicing. Harrison saw a need and decided to fill it.

When I met with Harrison regarding coming on board at BCG, one of the first things I remember him saying was that his goal was to "improve the lateral-hiring process for both the candidates and the law firms." Harrison's approach was very attractive to me, as I had always believed that the process could be improved and that the relationship between search firms and law firms did not need to be so strained. Now on board, I am happy to be able to report that improving the process is, in fact, BCG's goal, and each member of the BCG team strives on a daily basis to accomplish it.



Harrison also emphasized the importance of providing helpful information to both the candidates and the law firms. I believe that BCG has and continues to do this. BCG's website provides very helpful articles for candidates contemplating using our services, which are written by our own BCG consultants. BCG also provides publications for law firms, including *How to Ensure You Hire Stars*, *Choosing a Legal Search Firm*, *Opening Branch Offices*, *How Attorneys Choose Law Firms*, and *The 2001 BCG Class Ranking Guide*. BCG has also employed full-time research staff, who spend all day researching our law firm clients and updating our research files with the most current information on the law firms with which we deal on a regular basis.

In addition, BCG consultants strive to assist both candidates and law firm hiring professionals. We feel it is important to present to law firms an accurate, inclusive profile on every candidate we represent. We also strive to effectively follow-up with our candidates and law firm hiring professionals throughout the process. We take tremendous pride in the fact that we are making a difference in people's lives, their families' lives, and their happiness.

## IV. What are the risks I have taken?

Prior to making this transition, I had to evaluate the potential risks. The most obvious risk was that I would fail miserably! But what does it mean to succeed in this position? As mentioned before, the primary reason I enjoyed being a recruiting coordinator was the fact that I could help young people with their career goals and hopefully make their lives better along the way. If I feel as though I have been able to effectively help candidates make positive career changes, better their lives and their families' lives, and lend them the support they need along the way, I will feel remarkably successful. Likewise, if I feel as though the law firms in which they are placed feel they are receiving high-quality, hardworking, talented, and skilled attorneys who are good people, I will feel remarkably successful. These goals are very similar to the goals I had as a recruiting coordinator and remain my primary goals today.

Another more obscure risk was whether I would be able to be an advocate for the candidates I represent. I have found this to be quite easy at BCG. Because we seek to represent exceptional candidates and only those we feel the law firms we service would be happy to hire, it is easy to represent them wholeheartedly. As a recruiting coordinator, I was accustomed to scrutinizing resumes on behalf of my law firm, always keeping my firm's best interest in mind. But I was also often straddling the fence, mediating between my law firm and the potential new hire to ensure that the "fit" was right-for both parties. This is also true for me in my new position. I am still scrutinizing resumes for the best candidates, and I am still trying to mediate between the candidates and the law firms to ensure the best "fit" for both parties.

Another obvious risk was the potential financial risk I would incur. Thanks to a loving and supportive husband and the talented professionals at BCG, who have provided tremendous support, this has not been an issue. One of the most telling things Harrison said to me was "Work hard, and the rewards will follow." I believe he is right. When your focus is on working hard and helping people, the rewards follow naturally.

There was another risk-and one that is probably right on the tip of your tongue-the risk of being perceived as a "headhunter." As a recruiting coordinator, I very much enjoyed my involvement in the Chicago Association of Legal Recruiting Coordinators (CALRC), a group of outstanding and very talented recruiting professionals employed at major law firms in Chicago. I was somewhat concerned about how my move would be perceived by recruiting professionals. It was important to me to be able to maintain those relationships and to be able to help recruiting professionals in any way I could to achieve their goals. I believe that my former role as a recruiting coordinator has helped me be a better search consultant. I have found the members of CALRC to be very supportive and encouraging in this transition, and I remain extremely grateful for the long-term effect the Association and its members have had on my career.

## V. What are the rewards I have received or hope to receive?

The rewards I hope to receive are very similar to the rewards I have already received in my career. As a recruiting coordinator, the greatest rewards I received were instances in which I felt as though I made a difference in the life of a young recruit, an associate, or a partner and the corresponding long-term relationships I have established over the past 20 years. I have already felt the same rewards as a search consultant. Maybe my career hasn't changed that much after all!