

If the opportunity is right, it is worth the wait

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At least once a week, I feel like I end up lecturing my candidates on being patient with respect to the firms with which they have interviewed. Having been a candidate myself, and therefore at the mercy of the law firms, I completely understand how painful the process can be, but I am surprised at the number of candidates that sour on a firm based on the time it takes for it to respond with an offer or rejection. For example, I am working with a strong corporate candidate with a stellar background in M&A and securities. Originally from Chicago, she moved to Colorado about four years ago for family reasons, and she has been working with a top firm in Denver since then. She is now looking to return to Chicago, and based on her credentials, we had no problem getting her an interview with one of the best firms in town. In fact, the firm was impressed enough with the candidate's resume that it skipped the initial round of interviews and went straight to flying my candidate into town to meet the entire practice group.

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The interview went well from the perspective of my candidate, and she returned to Colorado hopeful that she would receive an offer from the firm. And that is when the painful portion of the process began.

A week passed. She emailed me for updates. I followed up with the firm and received some initial feedback that was very positive. However, because the attorneys in the group were so busy (hence the need to bring on another associate), they had not yet been able to interview the other two candidates they wanted to meet before making a final decision. I relayed this information to my candidate and promised to follow up the following week.

The following week came and went, and as promised, I followed up with the firm. Nothing to report. Same thing for the next week. Finally, about three and a half weeks after the interview, the recruiter called me to apologize for taking so long to get back to me, and then informed me that the group still had no decision on my candidate's interview. I immediately informed my candidate that she would need to sit tight for another week or more, but by now she sounded a bit annoyed and said something like "when a firm delays likes this, it usually means they are not interested."

Um, not true. Not true at all. I cannot tell you how many firms I work with that have taken weeks--make that months, to get back to me post-interview, and many of them have extended offers to the candidate. The passage of time, especially when dealing with a large, busy law firm, means nothing other than the group has not yet made a decision regarding the candidate's interview.

In the mind of the candidate (stereotypically speaking, of course), it should not be that hard for a firm to get its people together to decide whether to hire someone with whom it has interviewed. Thanks to email, the group doesn't even have to meet face to face--just circulate a couple of messages about who likes who, and then make a decision based on the majority vote. Shouldn't take more than a day, right?

Wrong. The reality is that no matter how much a firm likes a candidate, client work comes before recruiting. That means that if a client matter arises unexpectedly, recruiting decisions are placed on the back burner, and a candidate can be left waiting for weeks for an answer. Likewise, if hiring decisions need to be approved by the Hiring Partner for the firm (or worse, a committee of attorneys in charge of hiring), additional delays may result if one or more of these attorneys is not available to provide approval.

This is precisely what happened to my corporate candidate in Colorado. The firm gave some initial feedback

that was positive, but before they could interview the other two candidates they planned to interview, the head of the group was pulled away on a serious client-related matter. My candidate was left to wait. And wait. And wait.

Waiting is the worst. I think we can all agree on that. But just because a firm leaves a candidate waiting for weeks (or even months), that candidate does not get to jump to conclusions that the firm is not interested. In the case of my Colorado candidate, not only did she start to assume there was no interest on the part of the firm, but she started to get angry with the delay and called the firm "rude" and "inconsiderate." I did what I could to counter this, but my candidate became more and more convinced that the firm was stringing her along, and with each passing day, no matter how hard I tried, her bitterness grew.

Then, as luck would have it, the offer came.

And instead of just being excited to have the offer, this candidate had to work through her bitterness in order to get back to where she had been shortly after the interview. At one point, she almost turned down the offer because she felt as if the firm did not want her "enough." Eventually, after much discussion, she realized what I knew all along: firms are large institutions that often move at a snail's pace, but this does not mean that the firm is not enthusiastic about a specific candidate. It simply means that we need to learn to be a little more patient. After all, if the opportunity is a good, long-term fit, it is worth the wait.

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