

How to be Headhunted

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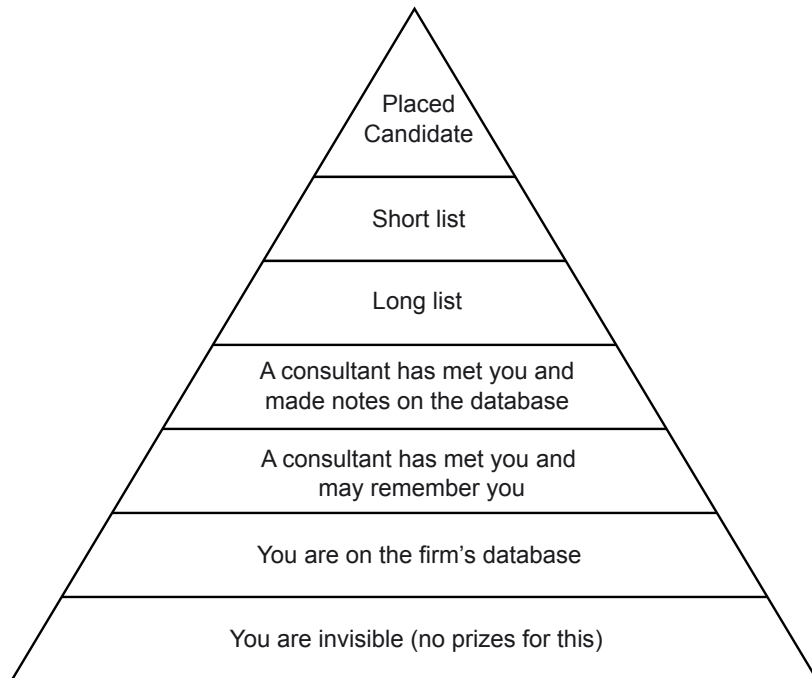
CHAPTER 5 - BUILDING AWARENESS

Some people assume that word of their talents will spread, and headhunters will then start calling them. At the other extreme are candidates who believe that search firms need constant reminders, including frequent phone calls and e-mails attaching the same CV again and again!

The reality is somewhere in between. There *are* things you can do to become better known. Consultants and researchers will then think of you when the right opportunity comes up. On the other hand, it is best to do this with a light touch, to avoid being regarded as a nuisance.

HIERARCHY OF AWARENESS

As in any other market, those who might need your services have a patchy knowledge of what is on offer. For each consultant or research associate, there is effectively a *hierarchy of awareness*:



We will discuss these levels of awareness from the bottom up.

a) You are invisible

This is the first extreme, mentioned above. If you do nothing, you may rarely, if ever, receive phone calls from search firms.

Of course, a search firm could come across you during an assignment. If you are very good at your job, then former colleagues, or even the people you work with now, may recommend you. If you are active in trade associations or other industry bodies, you will become more visible. If you have spoken regularly at conferences, or are an acknowledged media pundit, then research associates may track you down. However, there is no guarantee of this, and a direct approach to search firms is definitely worthwhile.

You can greatly improve your chances of being approached by sending your CV to a number of search firms, in the right manner. Some firms also allow you to fill in a registration form over the internet. In either case, your aim is to be included on the company's database. Do not expect to hear back from them unless you happen to fit a current assignment. Some firms may send you an e-mail or a letter as an acknowledgement; most will not. It is best *not* to follow up with a phone call. If the firm has a relevant assignment, one of its researchers or consultants will contact you.

Making it onto the firm's database is already an achievement, and you will only get there if you have targeted the right company in the first place. Having read this far, you know how to identify the appropriate firms and consultants. Their websites will also give you strong clues about whether your background is likely to be of interest. They usually tell you the sectors in which they work, and sometimes the salary ranges too. If you send your CV to a firm which does not work in your field or at your level, they will sometimes tell you they cannot help you. More often, you will hear nothing from them, and your CV will head straight for the shredder.

Even if your background *is* highly relevant and you are a potential candidate for an assignment, you can improve your chances further. One of the best ways is to make life easier for the person receiving your CV. This includes writing it in the 'headhunter-friendly' format we recommend in Chapter Eight.

It is also a good idea to send your CV in electronic form so that it can be attached to the firm's database. This enables everyone in the firm to retrieve it when required. In theory, if your paper CV is really interesting, someone might decide to scan it. However, since current assignments always take

precedence, your precious document may end up in the 'pending' tray of an overworked secretary. A clear e-mail with your CV attached is the best means of ensuring that the firm includes you on its database right away.

b) You are on the firm's database

Once you are on the database, everyone in the firm can retrieve your details when required. This is a good start. However, a large firm's database may include over a million people worldwide, so you should not hold your breath!

Your work experience will normally be coded by industry and by job function, so that consultants and research associates can find you quickly. Search firms tend to use SIC (Standard Industrial Classification) or similar codes to describe the sectors in which you have worked. They then use function codes to describe your jobs with each company. This enables research associates to retrieve the records of all candidates who meet the criteria for a particular assignment.

It is vitally important that you are coded correctly, so your name comes up in relation to the appropriate sector and job function. You can help to ensure this happens by making your CV as clear as possible. Particularly if you have worked for a small company which is not well known, you should include a brief description of what it does. You should also explain your responsibilities as clearly as possible.

Once you have sent your CV to a number of search firms, we recommend that you stay in touch with the five to ten firms you believe are most relevant to your career. When you move jobs or are promoted, let these firms know and make sure they have your updated CV.

You can also act as a helpful source of information, responding promptly to researchers' phone calls and recommending potential candidates. Even if no one from the firm has ever met you, they are likely to make positive comments about you on the database. You are then likely to be classified as a 'helpful source'. This increases the likelihood that you will hear about opportunities which could interest you. As soon as the search firm wins an assignment for which your background is directly relevant, the consultant or research associate will call you.

While you are talking to staff at the search firm, you can check in passing that your current CV is attached to their database and that you have been coded correctly. Incidentally, under the Data Protection Act you have a right to know what information the firm holds on your file. You can also ask to be taken off a firm's database at any time.

c) A consultant has met you and may remember you

This is better than just being on the database, but not necessarily by much! Keyboard skills vary greatly from one consultant to another, and some do not always switch on their computers. Notes may or may not end up on the database, where colleagues can read and use them. Some consultants still subscribe to the view that "knowledge is power". They keep as much information as possible in their heads, or in their own cardboard folders.

Of course, many consultants and research associates are very diligent. Some firms make the quality of database entries a factor in qualifying for bonuses. However, there are alarming stories about Consultant A meeting Mr Outstanding and neither telling Consultant B nor making any meaningful entries on the database. Consultant B then wins and completes an assignment, without considering Mr Outstanding, even though he would have been an excellent candidate!

There is not much you can do about this, other than to check that you are on the database and correctly coded. A research associate, a consultant's personal assistant, or someone in the information department, is probably best placed to help you.

d) A consultant has met you and made notes on the database

This is a big improvement on (c) above. Since databases usually function across all the firm's offices, everyone can now read about you and consider you for relevant assignments. The consultant's comments will bring your database entry to life and will be much more persuasive than your CV on its own.

e) You have been on a long list

The long list consists of all the candidates the search team has identified as relevant to a particular assignment. Sometimes this list exists only in virtual form: relevant candidate records are linked to the assignment on the firm's database. The list can then be printed out whenever required, for internal discussion. In other cases the long list may be a working document in printed form which is updated at regular intervals.

Whatever the format, being on the long list is a step forward in the firm's awareness of you. There will normally be comments by the consultant or research associate, discussing your suitability as a candidate.

Whether or not you make it onto the short list for this assignment, you are starting to become known within the firm. Researchers and consultants working on similar assignments in the future will usually take a close look at the long list. It will help them identify their first few relevant candidates, and you could be among them.

Please note that you may be included on a long list without meeting the search consultant. This can occur if you have a strong CV and have been recommended by several people. However, the search firm should only forward information about you to the client with your permission. If the client is interested to find out more, the consultant will then meet you for an interview.

f) A consultant has presented you as a short-list candidate

By this stage the consultant will have met you and written a detailed appraisal on you, describing your experience and assessing your suitability for the role in question. These appraisals are usually kept as an attachment to the database.

When the next assignment comes up, you are already well documented. You are more likely to be added to the long list and perhaps the short list. During a discussion of the long list, a client will frequently ask the consultant if they have met any of the candidates mentioned. If the same consultant is handling this new assignment, it makes a good impression if they are able to describe you vividly. If you have been on a short list before, you are also ideally placed to be a benchmark candidate, as discussed in Chapter Four.

It is quite common for short list candidates to become clients of the firm, even if they do not get this particular job. If the search team has handled them professionally, candidates may feel that this would be a good firm to represent their own companies. Many clients are quite rightly concerned that all candidates are treated well, since it enhances their company's reputation among an influential group of people.

g) Placed candidate

Congratulations!

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