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YOU'VE GOT A FRIEND ...

Several months ago, I was on a panel at one of the business schools with representatives from two other recruiting firms. Near the end of the program, when it was opened to questions from the audience, one student stood up at the back of the room and asked “How can I build a relationship with a recruiter?” A good question, and one that I don’t hear often enough. Usually the question comes out “How can you get me a job?” Now, perhaps that’s what the fellow meant and he just used a higher vocabulary to ask his question, but I’ll give him the benefit of the doubt.

What surprised me, were the answers from the other two recruiters on the panel. The first gal answered him “Send me an email with your resume and if I have a job for you, I’ll be in touch.” The other recruiter said, “Don’t send me an email! Go to our website and apply online. If we have something for you, someone will be in touch with instructions.”

When it came my turn to reply, I answered, “I’m here, right now. Come on up after the session and introduce yourself to me so I can put a face with your name. By all means, send me your resume by email and go to our website to familiarize yourself with our opportunities. But building a relationship is about getting to know one another now and continuing the development of that relationship over time, so please keep in touch.”

That evening, I took the shuttle back to NY with one of the recruiters on the panel. While waiting for a taxi, he said to me, “Denise, you’re going to get 500 calls and emails from what you said and you know full well you can’t get all 500 of those people new jobs.” I replied to him that I certainly hoped to get 500 calls and emails from that crowd, because that’s what the exercise was about, but that more importantly – I did not say that I would get each one of those people a job in response to their call. What I said, and what I really meant, was that I would build a relationship with each and every one of them who bothered to introduce themselves to me, or send me an email or follow up with a phone call.

To me, there is a big distinction in “getting someone a job” and “building a relationship to help someone advance in their career.” It’s not about just making a buck off a candidate by sticking them in a job – to many recruiters, that’s what they do. To me, it’s about being a resource and helping people change their lives. That means, that I will gladly review your resume and give you my thoughts about how it’s playing in the marketplace and why you may or may not be getting the traction you’re looking for. It means that I will gladly help you evaluate an offer that you’re considering – yes, even though it’s not an offer I brought to you – because that’s what people in relationships do – they help each other.

Of course, I hope to help every person who comes to me to get a new job – that’s a win/win for both of us. But, more importantly, in building relationships, that means that I’m available as a sounding board as well as a bridge and an introduction. I know that the

world is round and our lives are long and we will have many opportunities to interact with each other and building a strong relationship with a recruiter is the key to a candidate's future.

Some ways to build relationships with recruiters include – making sure that you keep your cv updated with the recruiter so he or she will have your current information. If they can't find you, they can't help you.

It also means taking the recruiter's calls; yes, even when you're not looking! Telling a recruiter that you don't have time to talk to them because you're not looking means that you're only in it for what's in it for you. If you can't take their call, why would they take your call? Remember, you are a resource to the recruiter, too. Listen to what they have on tap and see if you have anyone you might be able to refer them to who would be a good candidate. It builds good karma and it moves you to the top of a recruiter's good list when you need them again for your own career.

Remember to say "please" and "thank you" – it sounds basic, but the simple courtesies you would extend to a client or a friend should apply for your relationship with a recruiter too. Be considerate of their time and always follow up to let them know where you land when your search is done and to thank them for whatever help they offered you. It helps them to keep in touch with you and it is always genuinely appreciated when someone thanks you for any kindness they've extended to you, no matter how small.

Don't "blast email" recruiters. You don't want a recruiter to treat you like one of many interchangeable candidates, so please don't treat a recruiter like they're an interchangeable service provider. Send individual emails to the various recruiters you are using without cc'ing all the other recruiters. Remember, it's about building a relationship, not seeing how many recruiters you can speed date.

And, be respectful of the relationship. That means making the personal connection with the recruiter, not just calling them on the 15th of every month saying "do you have anything for me". Offer to be helpful, share of yourself and consider the conversations and emails you have with a recruiter to be as beneficial and welcome as the conversations and emails you exchange with your close friends. It's not uncommon for the candidates in my circle to keep me informed of the births of their new babies and the joys and disappointments in their careers and I was happy to share the news of my recent marriage with them as well because for me they are more than just "candidates" – they are important people in the world in which I live and I hope to be helpful to each of them in some way soon.

With that in mind, if I can be helpful to you in building our relationship, please feel free to reach out to me at dpalmieri@pinnaclegroup.com. James Taylor put it best ... Winter, Spring, Summer or Fall, all you gotta do is call. And I'll be there, yes I will, you've got a friend.
