



THE KEYS TO A WINNING COLLABORATION

## How to Work with Executive Recruiters

Both parties have their pet peeves with the other, but a smooth job seeker-recruiter partnership can lead you to a new job and the recruiter to a happy client – quite the win-win. By Elizabeth Bennett

Harold Laslo is a staffing specialist with the Aldan Troy Group. He advises job seekers to ask how long their recruiter has worked with the hiring company. This speaks to how well they know what the client is looking for in a candidate.

YOU MET WITH A RECRUITER, but now she's not responding to your e-mails. Maybe your background is perfect but you don't make it past the phone screen. How could it be that you're "not a good fit" when you're so clearly made for the position?

TheLadders spoke with several current and former third-party recruiters, as well as job seekers, to learn more about the nuts and bolts of working with a recruiter.

Job hunters tend to view recruiters as an unfortunate necessity in the search process, regarding them as the people

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## How to Win Jobs and Influence Recruiters

By Matthew Rothenberg, Editor-in-Chief, TheLadders



THELADDERS editorial team reads all e-mails crossing our customer-service desk to find the hottest topics for job seekers. Judging from those comments, few subjects

spike temperatures like communications with executive recruiters.

"Nobody has the professional courtesy to get back to me or any person submitting job applications," one frustrated job seeker complained to TheLadders. "The online application

goes into a black hole, never to be heard from again."

"I sent an e-mail to a recruiter two weeks ago asking for status of that job and still have not received a reply," another candidate said. "I find that very frustrating and unprofessional."

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### What did you think of this package?

Got a story of your own to tell? Have ideas for future coverage? Please write Editor-in-Chief Matthew Rothenberg at [matthewr@theladders.com](mailto:matthewr@theladders.com).

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who don't respond and don't really know what the hiring company is looking for.

It turns out that many job seekers have misconceptions about the most basic role of a recruiter. "They don't understand that we don't work for them," said Greg Bennett, a headhunter at the Mergis Group in Cary, N.C. "We work for the client" — the hiring company.



Bennett

Below are some typical scenarios in which job seekers may find themselves. We asked the recruiters what's happening at their end.

**Scenario One: You think you're a perfect fit for the position, yet the recruiter isn't responding to your application or your follow-up calls and e-mails. Potential red flags may include:**

application or your follow-up calls and e-mails. Potential red flags may include:

You're not qualified for the job.

- Like it or not, your work experience may not fit the bill. It could be that the hiring company is looking for 10 years of sales experience and that your 15 years in sales is not attractive. It's also possible that you didn't read the posting closely, or at all. "When a job seeker ignores certain stipulations such as a listing that requests local candidates only or has degree requirements that don't match, it becomes evident that they are answering postings without reading them," said Sherry Brickman, a partner at Martin Partners, a retained search firm in Chicago. "This is a waste of time for everyone involved as well as frustrating for a recruiter."



Brickman

You're a good fit but not an ideal fit.

ARTHUR MANDELL

## Why Employers Use Executive Recruiters

"RECRUITERS ARE THE FIRST line of attack — almost a gatekeeper," said Arthur Mandell, who has worked with executive recruiters to fill hundreds of positions during his 25-plus years in the commercial lending and equipment-leasing industry.

Mandell said he tends to play a very active role in the recruiting process. He also leans on recruiters when evaluating job candidates. "I would ask them to find out more about certain points [in their job history], how they would

benefit the business, or about things in their background I don't understand," explained Mandell, whose most recent post was as executive vice president and managing director of Equilease, a privately held equipment leasing and financing company.

Like many employers, Mandell's main concern when hiring is that the candidate be able to execute ideas and bring results. To that end, he has frequently called on his recruiting partners to plumb the depths of a candidate's

work history. "I would say, 'Do you know this guy? Were they successful or not at their last position?' You try to get as much information as you can."

Having also spent time as a job seeker, Mandell is sympathetic to candidates who resent recruiters who seem unwilling to espouse their application when their background isn't an obvious fit. "Most recruiters are advocates for em-

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In fact, I've heard more than one frustrated job seeker opine that if these recruiters were working for them, they'd be fired.

What are those recruiters doing with their time? And how can you help them help you?

As this report by Elizabeth Bennett describes, the relationship between

job seekers and recruiters can provoke frustration from both sides — or lead to productive new opportunities as both parties join forces to make a perfect match for the hiring company.

Getting from initial inquiry to final offer is a delicate dance with more steps than a minuet — and slam-

dancing your way past recruiters is not going to get results!

Even if you do all your homework, and even if you catch the eye of the recruiter, the final decision rests with the hiring company. Knowing where each party's role begins and ends is the key to waltzing away with the job. ■

- “[Third-party recruiting] agencies get paid a lot of money to find people that a corporation in need of staff can’t,” according to Michael Rosenberg, manager of sales, productivity and performance at TheLadders. “And with a 15 to 25 percent fee going to the recruiter, corporations want to make sure they hire the exact right person.” In plenty of cases, almost isn’t good enough, especially now that recruiters are pulling from a larger applicant pool.

Your recruiter — or the hiring company — isn’t effectively communicating the job specifications.

- Sometimes recruiters aren’t able effectively to express what their client is looking for, a result of their own limitations or their client’s lack of specificity. The larger the organization, the more red tape there is, according to Rosenberg.

Your e-mail subject line could be slowing down the process.

- Effective subject lines in e-mails should reference the position you’re applying for, rather than “Hello” or “Intro,” Rosenberg said. If a recruiter is sorting through hundreds of e-mails a day, it makes her life easier if she receives a cue about the contents of the e-mail.

Your resume may not be conveying your story at a glance.

- With so little time to devote to each resume, make it easy for recruiters to find what they’re looking for: your last employer and position, your tenure there, and the three most relevant bullet points based on the job you’re applying for. If a quick scan doesn’t yield a compelling career narrative, Rosenberg said it’s possible that your application will never make it beyond the inbox.

Misspellings of any kind turn off some recruiters.

- Typos may leave the impression that you don’t pay attention to details. Double- and triple-check your cover letter and resume. Better still, have someone with an eye for detail proof it.

A generic cover letter could be your undoing.

- Recruiters may read the lack of specificity as lazy and/or uncaring, Rosenberg said. Tailor each letter to the particular company, industry and position to which you’re applying.

Superlatives may be getting in your way.

- For instance, calling yourself the “best” or “greatest” CPA without supporting evidence can be perceived as cocky. “It suggests the job seeker is way too sure of himself and may be tough to work for,” Rosenberg observed. “A recruiter could build a story in their head before they even get you on the phone.”

**What can you do?** Not much if you’re not qualified, but applying for a specific job and making sure that you’ve dotted all your “I’s” and customized your cover letter will at least ensure you’re getting the attention you deserve.

## Scenario Two: You didn’t make it past the recruiter’s phone screener.

Your general attitude could be a mismatch with the hiring company.

- For instance, your professional-yet-serious demeanor may not work in a setting where a sense of lightness and humor is considered a priority for managers, said Harold Laslo, a staffing specialist at the Aldan Troy Group in New York. Don’t take it personally. The longer a recruiter has worked with the hiring company, the better he’s able to evaluate your candidacy.

You didn’t listen to the questions.

- During phone screens and interviews, less is often more. Whether the cause is nervousness, self-absorption or other limitations, candidates sometimes provide far more information than a question warrants, according to Marian Rich, a recruiter with Bonell Ryan, a retained search firm in New York. Rich said she often asks candidates to give a quick overview of their careers, probing for details later in the process. “I’m always dismayed at how many candidates launch into an in-depth and very lengthy response,” Rich said. “It can put me off and will certainly raise the question of whether or not this candidate will interview well with a client.”

**What can you do?** Follow up with the recruiter to ask her why you’re not a good fit. She should be able to provide a concrete reason. If she can do that — and you trust her assessment — let her know you’d like to be considered for future positions.

## Scenario Three: You met the recruiter in person, but now he doesn’t think you’re right for the job.

Your work style may not be suited to the position.

- For example, the recruiter may determine that you thrive in structured work settings, but the hiring company is looking for someone who functions best in an unstructured environment. Once again, recruiters who have placed candidates with the hiring company have a good sense of who would succeed there. It is well within a job seeker’s rights to ask how long the recruiter has worked with a certain company, said Laslo of Aldan Troy.

Your personality may not be a match for certain company or department cultures.

- For instance, you may think your ambition and assertive personality could only be an asset, but it could signal potential challenges at some firms. “If a candidate has career aspirations and I pick up that they may not have patience before they see advancement or will be

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## Three Lessons I Learned from Executive Recruiters

By John O'Connor

YOU MAY REMEMBER THIS SCENE from the 1946 film of “It’s a Wonderful Life.” Cast me as George Bailey, and cast Mr. Potter as the executive recruiter. This is how I felt when I met with executive recruiters early in my career.

POTTER’S OFFICE – DAYTIME

CLOSE SHOT

Potter is lighting a big cigar, which he has just given George. The goon is beside Potter’s chair, as usual.

GEORGE

Thank you, sir. Quite a cigar, Mr. Potter.

POTTER

You like it? I’ll send you a box.

GEORGE

(nervously)

Well, I... I suppose I’ll find out sooner or later, but just what exactly did you want to see me about?

POTTER

(laughs)

George, now that’s just what I like so much about you.

(pleasantly and smoothly)

George, I’m an old man, and most people hate me. But I don’t like them either, so that makes it all even. You know just as well as I do that I run practically everything in this town but the Bailey Building and Loan. You know, also, that for a number of years I’ve been trying to get control of it... or kill it. But I haven’t been able to do it. You have been stopping me. In fact, you have beaten me, George, and as anyone in this county can tell you, that takes some doing. Take during the Depression, for instance. You and I were the only ones that kept our heads. You saved the Building and Loan, and I saved all the rest.

The lesson of the story? In a tough economy, keep your head, and keep your senses about you. Go back to the basics

of how to work with executive recruiters. Executive recruiters are good coaches — not careless and callous like Mr. Potter — but they taught me tough lessons.

In my early days, I would sit in front of executive recruiters, in their really small chairs, and advocate for my clients. When they would pull out the stacks of resumes and show me that not one person made their business, it made me very uncomfortable. Most job seekers feel powerless when dealing with executive recruiters. Perhaps several of my early worklife lessons will help you understand the reality behind how they work and what they do.

### Know your terms.

If you’re working with a recruiter, you need to know if they are in house or third-party. Are you familiar with the terms “recruiter,” “executive recruiter” and the slang term “headhunter”?

Recruiter is a general term that can refer either to an in-house recruiter or a third-party retained or contingency recruiter (headhunter). Executive recruiters are often on staff and in house at the company you want to work for. Then there are cases where an executive recruiter may not be in house, but has a contingency relationship with that company to provide qualified candidates for potential hiring. You may also be working with retained recruiters. Retained recruiters generally get paid their fee regardless of whether or not the company makes the hire. Contingency recruiters, however, are paid based upon performance.

Here is how the Association of Executive Search Consultants (AESC), a New York-based trade group for retained search firms, defines the difference between the two compensation arrangements:

Contingency recruiting is often used for:

- Less than \$100K+ salaries, though there are exceptions
- Positions which have many qualified candidates
- Filling multiple vacancies with similar candidates
- Hiring organizations that want more involvement in screening, interviewing and negotiating

Retained firms are often used for:

- \$100K+ salaries
- Highly unique or specialized candidate sourcing
- Hiring organizations that want a third party to screen and interview candidates

Retained recruiters often have been partially compensated and have already been paid to do part of the search. These retained searches have been given to the retained firm so that the recruiter can have an exclusive, with no competition from other recruiting firms. Retained searches allow third-party recruiters to “retain” exclusive rights to find the right person.

**Build your relationship before you need it.**

George Bailey ended up in Mr. Potter’s office in his hour of desperation. Hopefully, you don’t send unsolicited resumes or, worse, show up in an executive recruiter’s office in your greatest time of need — when you *need* a job. In my early experience I would send unsolicited resumes, and I quickly learned a key lesson: Recruiters “place people,” they don’t “find jobs.”

A recruiter may dispense job-search advice, but most of her time is spent finding the right fit for the client, the employer. Approaching an executive recruiter with the right expectations is a major factor in how successful your relationship will be. It’s wisest to step back and take the long-term view of your relationship with a recruiter.

You should make your first contact with a recruiter long before you are in desperate need of a new job. Think of it as a networking relationship in which you have a relaxed give-and-take rapport and information sharing. A good recruiter will always be interested in good leads and information. Depending on how comfortable he is with you, he may even be able to give you advice on ways to improve your chances for job placement in the future — such as what specific accomplishments in your current job will make you more attractive to potential employers.

In turn, you should be helpful to the recruiter by providing good job prospects for him. This doesn’t mean just throwing names at him but offering up substantial information that will be helpful. Remember that the executive recruiter is essentially working for the client company — and he’s often working on multiple placements at any given time. If you’re not on his radar screen when the job you’d be qualified for comes up, then you’ll have missed your chance. The best way to stay on his radar screen is to offer assistance without expecting anything in return.

**Don’t be a wandering generality.**

I remember telling an executive recruiter how great one of my clients was and how this person could help his firm drive revenue and reduce costs. He let me rattle on for about

10 minutes before he cut in, “John, I don’t recruit for medical sales positions. I recruit for physicians who want to go from private practice or related work to the CROs (Contract Research Organizations).”

I only thought that his firm worked with sales people.

He went on to explain, “I don’t get paid until I find an exact match for one of these positions, and I don’t work with, talk to or do much of anything else as it relates to recruiting.” This lesson taught me that some recruiters must specialize in very restricted niches. When working with highly focused recruiters, it’s important quickly to identify what they’re looking for and convey specific achievements. Key questions to ask specialized recruiters are:

- Do you or any of the recruiters at your firm specialize in placing people like me and my specific background?
  - Who at your firm knows if I would be a good candidate to be placed?
  - How can I study your most recent opportunities so that I know I am a good candidate for your firm to place?
- Prepare resumes professionally and carefully, and go into any interview, including interviews with third-party recruiters, with intelligent, cogent questions.

**Recruiters ‘place people,’ they don’t ‘find jobs.’**

Don’t be intimidated by executive recruiters. They don’t run the town and are not the only hiring authorities. They can, however, be an important part of your search process. Get help in identifying them, how they work, and how they can help you. Make sure you speak to them and find out their niche, and how you can help them. While they ultimately work for the client company, they also have a vested interest in helping you. ■

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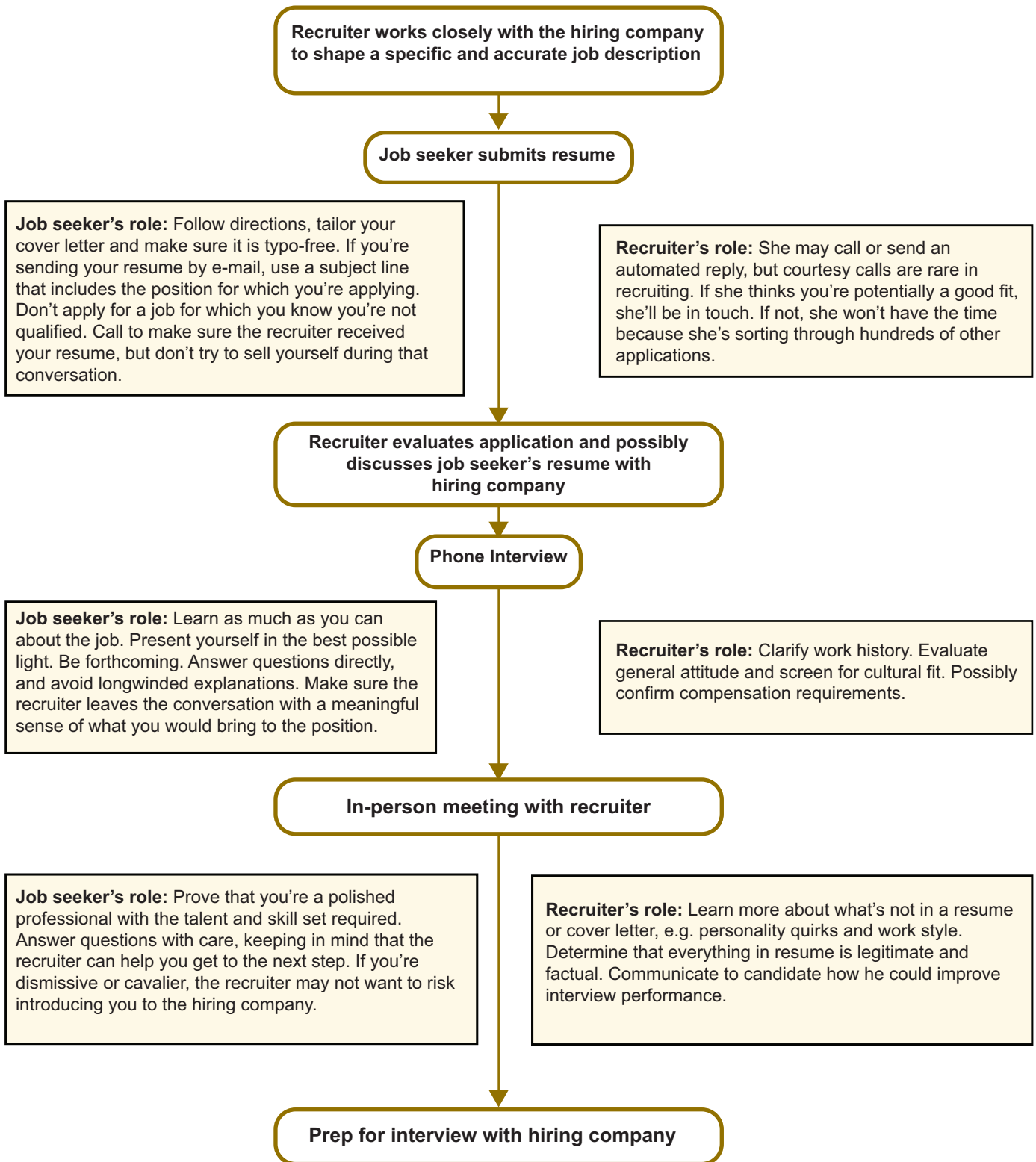
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ployers, so if an employer has said they want someone with 15 years of experience and someone comes along with the right experience over a different number of years, they’re not necessarily going to fight that battle.” And these days, he observed, with so many people in the applicant pool, companies are in the position to be even more choosy than in the past.

Mandell is currently working with recruiters on his own employment search, and his years of experience on the other end of the process have provided some useful insights. “Job seekers can blame recruiters for not being able to communicate the position requirements, but the burden is with the employer’s senior hiring manager and the degree to which he has shared his vision with the recruiter,” Mandell told TheLadders. “Sometimes the recruiter is just the messenger.” ■

## Your Role — And The Recruiter's

Recruiters and job seekers each have roles to play every step of the way. Make sure you do your part.



**Prep for interview with hiring company**

**Job seeker's role:** Gather as much information as possible about what the hiring manager is looking for, who you'll be meeting with and potential questions he might ask.

**Recruiter's role:** Help candidate understand what she can expect from the interview, including who they will be meeting with and what they should emphasize with certain interviewers. Good recruiters will relay obstacles that past candidates encountered when interviewing at the hiring company.

**Interview with client**

**Hiring company discusses job seekers with recruiter**

**Recruiter and job seeker talk post-interview**

**Job seeker's role:** Do not disappear. If you don't get in touch quickly, it may give the impression of disinterest, regardless of the circumstances. At every touch point, you should remind the recruiter of how reliable you are. If you're absolutely not interested in the position and wouldn't consider accepting an offer, don't say that you are.

**No offer**

**Job seeker's role:** Accept feedback graciously. Don't be irrational or belligerent. Find out more about why you weren't a match. If the recruiter isn't being specific, ask for more information. It could be that the company is being reticent.

**Recruiter's role:** Provide specific reasons why the company didn't think job seeker was a good fit.

**Offer**

**Job seeker's role:** Gather as much information as possible about compensation, bonus structure and benefits. Respond as quickly as possible without rushing the decision.

**Recruiter's role:** Communicate terms of offer and compensation information. Some hiring companies prefer to discuss salary and other components of the package directly with the job seeker. Gauge job seeker's level of interest and acceptable compensation range.

## Five Ways to Make Your Recruiter's Job Easier

Here's a short list of tactics to make the recruiter's life easier — and increase your chances of landing that job.

**1. Don't try to be a square peg in a round hole.** If the hiring company is looking for a candidate with 10 years of experience in small companies, don't act as if your 20 years at large companies isn't right there on paper. "Candidates need to know that nothing would make us happier than saying, 'Yes, this is a good fit,'" said Marian Rich of Bonell Ryan. "But our clients pay us to bring candidates who most closely align with their ideal profile."

**2. Don't be cagey about compensation.** The first question that hiring managers tend to ask recruiters is how much the job seeker is earning, Rich said. So when candidates hesitate to disclose their compensation or instead inquire about what the prospective job would pay, Rich takes pause, wondering why the candidate is not forthcoming. "It is always better to give us the information that we need to represent anyone to our clients and to be as honest as possible around issues concerning compensation," Rich explained.

**3. Establish an understanding about phone calls and e-mails.** If your every phone call is not promptly returned, it could be that the recruiter is extremely busy or that your background won't help him fill an immediate position. While you may disagree, sending frequent or belligerent e-mails won't change his mind and may make him not want to work

with you on future positions. "Every now and then I get a nasty e-mail that will say, 'This is the third time I've sent you my resume and you're not even bothering to respond,'" said Frank Laux, president of Strategic Search Partners in Keller, Texas. "But they didn't understand that they weren't qualified for anything I had."



Laux

**4. After your interview with the hiring company, contact your recruiter right away.** You may be busy or feel like the interview was lousy, but it's still your responsibility to let the recruiter know how it went. It could be that the hiring company wants quickly to schedule another interview. "The lack of follow-up may show a level of disinterest, which isn't always the case," noted Harold Laslo of the Aldan Troy Group in New York.

**5. Refer talented friends and colleagues to your recruiter.** It could only work to your advantage to recommend talented people to your recruiter(s), even for a role that you wanted but weren't qualified to perform. Your recruiter will appreciate the help and he may return the favor in the future. ■

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badgering HR in regards to advancement, they may not be right for certain companies," Laslo said, adding that small companies tend to be more focused on personality than large ones.

**What can you do?** Talk to your recruiter and find out exactly why you're no longer in the running. Gather as much information as you can and ask if there's anything about your personal performance that you could improve.

**Scenario Four: The recruiter is being vague about why the hiring company doesn't want to proceed with your application.**

She may not have all the information.

- Recruiters agree that at each point in the application process your recruiter should be able to cite specific reasons why she (or the hiring company) doesn't think you're a suitable candidate for the job. But recruiters don't always have that information if the hiring company is reticent to disclose it for legal or other reasons, said Rosenberg.

She may be reluctant to talk about personal quirks.

- If the hiring company is troubled by your lack of personal hygiene, for example, the recruiter may withhold the information if she thinks it's not constructive.

**What can you do?** Strike a friendly tone when probing for details. Help the recruiter understand that you value his feedback and would appreciate any information he's able to supply. ■

### Career Advice from TheLadders

- How to Work with a Recruiter
- Recruiter Relationships: Job Search Essentials
- Working with a Recruiter in a Buyer's Market
- Credibility with Your Recruiter