



*In this article, **Simon Healy, Managing Director of Atlantic Executive Search**, gives his thoughts on how to get the best from 'Talent Specialists'.*

“Like many industries, it only takes a few rogues to give everyone a bad name. The Talent industry has been blighted by this more than most and in some areas there is an uneasy relationship between Supplier Company and Client. Clients are often afraid of getting too close or relying too heavily on a particular partner. This is a sensible tactic at times, to mitigate risk, but it is a shame, because in my experience things work best and more **value is created when two firms partner very closely**.

I would always recommend that you should undertake your own extensive due diligence in choosing a partner. Do not be afraid to ask a firm for references! A good partner will want to build a **long term and sustainable relationship** with a client.

You should also be looking for a partner that can be trusted on two fronts.

- **To deliver the skill sets that you require in a timely manner**
- **To enhance your brand through appropriately high levels of candidate care**

A hard working researcher will talk to many people about your opportunity and your company. They will have a lasting impact on the perception of your brand.

Remember also – many more people will send you a CV, interview with you and be rejected, than will obtain jobs with you. In order to protect your brand these individuals will need to have their expectations managed appropriately so that any disappointment they feel in missing out does not turn into resentment. I know of many global brands that are now struggling to recruit talent because of how they are perceived. Frankly – they deserve to be struggling. They treated **people** with casual indifference in the past and will pay the price for years to come.

These are my tips for getting the most out of a talent specialist.

Always try to **meet the consultant** or researcher that will be working on your roles. These are the people that will brief candidates and give the first impression of your organisation. Make time to brief and work closely with them.

Ideally, the **hiring line manager** needs to spell out the role in his/her words rather than an internal recruitment manager. No offence is meant but the game of Chinese whispers illustrates a point here. Also, an in house person may be managing lots of roles. They cannot be expected to understand all of the roles that they manage which means that they will have difficulty briefing a talent specialist on the detail of what is required.

Take time also to spell out your **organisations ethos**, vision and direction as well as how it engages with employees. It is important to realise that you are competing for talent in the modern flexible world that we now live in. I think that the role of agents and the ability to talk with your feet will do more for “workers rights” than any trade union in the years to come. More than ever, you need an employee engagement strategy.

Be **clear and honest** with your consultants. They will stop supporting your organisation and turn it into a head hunting ground if you continually cancel assignments or mislead them. Very often they will be working on a fee upon success basis so they need to know where they stand and it is unethical to brief them on roles that are not signed off or if dozens of other agents are already on the case. Again – be warned – they will treat you like you treat them and in an age where head hunters regularly pull whole teams out of companies you need to play with a straight bat.

If you are working with a good company the people concerned will be professional and dedicated to what they do. When you give an instruction, they will commit a great deal of time and resource to the search.



If they are working on a fee structure that only rewards placement then they will be relying on you to **play your part in moving the process forward.**

Remember that candidates go off the market and lose interest. To **make sure your brand does not suffer** make sure you have processes in place to respond effectively and quickly at key points in the process.

CVs require review and feedback and interviews need follow up. It may be a process but the candidate is a human being and so is your consultant. If there are unavoidable delays be upfront and manage expectations early so that your consultant can manage the candidate. Remember, **you snooze you lose.**

Best practice tends to involve a small number of consultants or even better a consultant working exclusively on your role. Consultants thrive on clear channels of communication and clear feedback. With this they narrow the search and make your life easier. Working with a smaller group of consultants or just the one really facilitates this.

Use a **specialist** agency for the field that you are in. There are lots of companies offering “low cost” recruitment. The model does not work. If you are flying away on holiday the customer service level matters much less than if you are making a business critical hire. Specialists charge more but the total cost is much less! A specialist’s network and understanding make all the difference.

Happy Hunting!