



# Why Job-Hunters Hate Recruiters

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*I wrote this back in 2008.*

*All these years later, I still stand by it.*

*Hope you gain something helpful from it.*

*- Peter Gray*

*CEO, [Peter Gray Executive Search](http://www.petergraysearch.com)*

# Why Job-Hunters Hate Recruiters: Part I of 3

*By Peter Gray*

*Careers Column for the Capital Region Business Journal, June 2008*

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OK, time for a little introspection from an executive recruiter. A lot of job-seekers don't like my kind. And it's understandable. After all, they come to us looking for a job – the right job, in the right place, at the right time, for the right money – and we almost never give it to them. They often have a hard time just getting our attention at all.

The story is largely the same across the staffing and executive search business: job-seekers call, email and write us asking for a job interview, a conversation, a meeting, some acknowledgment that the recruiting firm is more than a black hole that swallowed their resume and gave nothing back. They assume that the jobs are going to someone else who has an elusive “inside track” or knows how to “work the process.”

This situation is not the result of shady recruiters with bad business practices (although there are some of those out there). It arises from the normal dynamics of our business. Unfortunately for job-seekers, the recruiting business is organized primarily to be of service to employers. In business terms, the successful recruiter is one who finds her client – the hiring company – the right employee, in the right place, at the right time, for the right money. And each successful recruiting effort delivers a job to exactly one job-seeker, while disappointing several who interviewed, and many more who wanted an interview but didn't get one.

I've had job-seekers ask if they can pay me to help them find a job. Unfortunately that model only seems to work for entertainers and pro athletes. In Hollywood terms, business recruiters are casting directors, not talent agents. We work for the movie.

Still, working with recruiters does not need to be so frustrating for job-seekers. There are things that both parties can do to make our working relationship better.

I believe that recruiters have a responsibility to treat job-seekers with courtesy and respect. We need to do a better job explaining how we work and setting reasonable expectations. We may not be able to be your personal agents delivering interviews and jobs on demand, but there is a different promise that good recruiters can deliver on: that we will give you the tools and information to monitor our fast-changing inventory of job leads on an equal footing with other job-seekers, so that when you see the right job come along, you will have a fair shot at it.

Next month: more on how recruiters can provide the best service to job-seekers, and how job-seekers can get the most out of recruiting firms.

## Why Job-Hunters Hate Recruiters

### Part 2 of 3: What Job-Seekers Can Do About It

By Peter Gray

Careers Column for the Capital Region Business Journal, July 2008

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Last month I got introspective and mused on the way job-seekers often find their interactions with executive recruiters unhelpful and unsatisfying. I promised to follow up with more on how job-seekers can get the most out of recruiting firms, and how recruiters can provide the best service to job-seekers.

They say the best things come in threes, so here goes: there are three important things you need to do as a job seeker, to get the most out of recruiters. First, understand how recruiters work; second, ask recruiters the right questions to find the right ones for you; and finally, stay informed about those recruiters' changing supplies of job openings.

Last month I explored how recruiting firms work, and why (although it must seem counterintuitive) we recruiters are not primarily focused on being helpful to job-seekers. To summarize, we are focused on helping our paying clients (employers) fill specific positions, and our job is to find candidates whose job experience exactly fits an employer's current needs. So if you're a job seeker who happens to fit one of a recruiter's current high-priority openings, then great – that recruiter urgently wants to speak with you. But if not, (and “not” is usually the case, because our clients define their needs very narrowly), we recruiters aren't in a position to be helpful with job leads in the immediate term. Job seekers ask for our help – notably for job leads, resume reviews, and compensation data – but we tend to be so consumed with our most urgent client needs that our follow-up with job-seekers often disappoints.

Unfortunately, we recruiters tend to do a bad job explaining to job-seekers how we work. We also have a mixed record of articulating what our specialty areas are. That's an important point about recruiters: we tend to be highly specialized, working to fill the same kinds of positions over and over. For job seekers, that means you want to find the right recruiters, and ignore the rest. So ask the right questions: “What kinds of positions do you specialize in filling, in what industries and job functions? In what parts of the country? At what typical salary levels? Are there employers you recruit for regularly?” Try asking “Have you filled many positions with candidates like me?” If the answer is no, don't waste any more time – that recruiter is not a fit for you.

If the answer is yes, and if the other answers fit your profile, that recruiter or firm is probably worth keeping an eye on. Ask “What is the right way to stay in touch with you, and stay informed about

your job opportunities?” Here again, recruiters vary widely. Some are transparent, with websites or email alerts that detail their current openings and invite applications. Others are sphinx-like in the lack of information they provide. But it’s up to you, the job-seeker, to manage your job search by keeping tabs on “your” recruiters and proactively staying informed as best you can.

Two parting lessons about recruiters who work on management-level hiring: we tend to be defined by job specialty more than by geography, so don’t be surprised if a recruiter in another part of the country has a good job for you (although you may need to relocate for it). Second, recruiters’ job opportunities come up on our clients’ timetables, not yours. So you’re better off investing the time in finding the right recruiters while you’re well employed, not when you’re in a pinch.

Do the best things really come in threes? I hope so, because I plan to conclude this three-part series next month with thoughts on how recruiters can provide the best service to job-seekers.

# Why Job-Hunters Hate Recruiters

## Part 3 of 3: What Recruiters Can Do About It

By Peter Gray

Careers Column for the Capital Region Business Journal, August 2008

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What can executive recruiters do to provide better service to job seekers?

This is the third in a three-part series on relations between executive recruiters and job-seekers. In June we explored why job-seekers often find their interactions with recruiters unhelpful and unsatisfying. In July I followed up with how job-seekers can get the most out of recruiting firms.

Now it's time for me to turn the spotlight on my industry, and propose some best practices for how we interact with job-seekers.

As we discussed over the last two months, employers are the recruiters' paying clients, so recruiters routinely (and let's face it, appropriately) prioritize service to employers above relations with job-seekers. But recruiters also need to maintain good relations with job seekers, lots and lots of them, so we can find highly qualified candidates for our clients' jobs, and quickly. Our quandary as recruiters is: how do we stay in touch with as many job-seekers as possible, and treat them as well as possible, while necessarily focusing most of our time and attention on employers?

Mostly, we can improve job-seeker satisfaction by redefining expectations, providing better information, and empowering job-seekers with technology tools.

Job-seekers often start with an expectation that is impossible for us recruiters to meet: they approach us expecting us to be "personal agents" or "job matchmakers" who can provide "jobs on demand." But we recruiters tend to do a lousy job explaining to job-seekers just why that expectation is misguided: we are in business as "casting directors" working for employers, not "talent agents" representing job-seekers. Unless we redefine these expectations, something most recruiting firms don't even try to do, we are bound to create a high level of dissatisfaction among job-seekers.

Recruiters need to reset expectations by creating, and communicating, a promise that we can deliver on: not that we will proactively deliver jobs on demand – we can't - but that we will give each job-seeker the tools to monitor our fast-changing inventory of job leads, so that when the right job comes along, anyone who's paying attention and is qualified will have a fair shot at it.

To deliver on that promise to job-seekers, recruiters need to follow some best practices:

- **Give straight talk to job-seekers.** They will appreciate being told explicitly what we recruiters can – and can't – promise them. This message should be supported on recruiting firm websites, in automated opt-in email communications, and in how recruiting firms train their staff to interact with job-seekers.
- **Strike the right balance between high-touch and low-touch.** Recruiters need to focus their high-touch time and attention on finding, screening and advancing the job-seekers who happen to be the best fits for current openings. But they also need to maintain an informational relationship with the broader range of job-seekers through an informative website, opt-in email updates, and account profiles that job-seekers can create and check online.
- **Automate as much job-seeker communication as possible.** Recruiting firms should acknowledge resume submissions with respectfully written auto-replies, and email appropriately targeted job listings to job-seekers on a consistent, automated basis.
- **Delegate data entry of job-seeker records to job-seekers.** Recruiters need to empower/encourage/require/train job-seekers to create and update their own profiles, the way the online job boards (like Monster and CareerBuilder) do. This helps job-seekers keep recruiters updated about their job status, and it helps recruiters find the right job seekers when an appropriate job opens up.
- **Enable job-seekers to segment themselves** – by profession and level – so we can find them in our database when we have an opening for them, and send them targeted job listings.
- **Give job-seekers searchable access to our full inventory of opportunities** – so they can take ownership of their job search.

Some of these practices are just common sense that recruiting firms can implement through commitment and training. But most of them involve smart use of information technology linking the power of the Internet, email, and database tools. This kind of technology-driven service capability is becoming more available – and more understood to be a business necessity – in all industries.

Putting top priority on serving employers makes sense for recruiters - in the short term. But chronic neglect of job-seekers hurts recruiters in the long term. It eventually damages their brand among their target professional communities, weakening their ability to introduce the best-fitting job-seekers to employers quickly. Good communication with job-seekers, on the other hand, feeds a virtuous cycle for recruiters: it generates good word-of-mouth in the industries where they recruit, builds stronger relationships with more and more job-seekers, leads to more job placements, and pays dividends in employer loyalty and client acquisition.

And all of that, if we're doing our jobs well, helps us recruiters to place more job-seekers in more jobs.

## Postscript: How Job-Hunters Can Connect with Me

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Thank you for reading “Why Job-Hunters Hate Recruiters.” A lot has changed since I wrote it back in 2008. Yet after re-reading it, I have to say ... it’s remarkable how little some things have changed.

I hope it gave you something useful.

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I love meeting talented people who care about making a positive impact in the world.

I may or may not be able to help you find a job at the moment. That depends on whether I’m currently doing any executive searches for jobs that are a good fit for you. Am I? You can see what jobs I’m actively recruiting for here:

<https://www.petergraysearch.com/jobs>

If so, please apply.

If not, please book an office hours meet & greet, or some coaching:

Office hours meet & greet (shorter, free):

<https://www.petergraysearch.com/office-hours>

Coaching (longer, 1 or multiple sessions, paid):

<https://www.petergraysearch.com/book-coaching>

Here’s a 1-page overview of my general coaching approach:

<https://bit.ly/peter-gray-coaching-overview>

If you’re looking for me to keep you in mind and in the loop for future opportunities, I’m happy to do that too. You can join my confidential talent bench by [submitting your resume](#) and some additional information here:

<https://www.petergraysearch.com/talent-bench>

And I’m always happy to connect on LinkedIn:

[linkedin.com/in/graypeter](https://www.linkedin.com/in/graypeter)

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**Peter Gray** (he/him) is a recovering Wall Street recruiter who now recruits social impact leaders and fights bias in hiring.

As founder and CEO of [Peter Gray Executive Search](#), based in Madison, Wisconsin, he guides nonprofit organizations and social impact employers through [strategic hiring](#). His placement experience includes 37 CEO [leadership successions](#), many at nonprofit organizations in the affordable housing and social services sectors.

Peter also [trains](#) employers on diversifying hiring outcomes, and [coaches](#) individuals on overcoming bias in job search and career advancement.

Peter began his career in executive search at Korn Ferry in New York City. Before that, he was a management consultant at CSC Index, the firm that pioneered business process reengineering.

Peter gives back as a member, adviser, and supporter of several nonprofit and civic organizations. A former Boys & Girls Club kid, he serves on the board of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Dane County. Through his own [fundraising](#) and his [leadership of fundraising campaigns](#), he has helped raise over \$10 million for the Boys & Girls Clubs.

Community service awards include Boys & Girls Clubs of Dane County's Volunteer of the Decade and Mentor of the Year awards, the Aviva Youmanity Award, and the Wisconsin Bicycle Federation's Advocate of the Year award. Current and past committees include Madison Rotary, Downtown Madison Inc., Madison Public Market, United Way of Dane County, Foundation for Madison's Public Schools, and the Madison Area Diversity Roundtable.

Peter earned an AB in Visual and Environmental Studies from Harvard University, and an MBA from Columbia Business School.

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