

Preventing the Dreaded Counter Offer

So you landed the recruit your company has been coveting. The offer letter is signed. The start date has been set. All you have to do now is lean back and bask in the praises of management for a job well done. But wait, there's still a chance that your cream-of-the-crop hire may not exactly be signed, sealed, and delivered just yet.

More and more companies are offering their employees counteroffers in hopes of retaining their prized possessions. This shouldn't come as a surprise to a recruiter. After all, you were the one willing to do everything necessary to get this employee on board with your client's company, so don't act alarmed when this person's current employer is willing to do whatever it takes to keep him or her.

You need to view this situation from the perspective of your recruit's current employer. When an employee submits a letter of resignation, it can send a company into panic mode. The company will scramble to either make a counteroffer or find a replacement before the person leaves. Also, because the employee is still employed by the company and still working on site, he or she is vulnerable to an attack on his or her conscience. Employers will do everything in their power to persuade your recruit by leveraging:

- relationships with co-workers
- the employee's sense of loyalty
- client relationships

And this is just the start. When an employer starts making the employee feel guilty and then offers your recruit more money, a better position, or an increase in benefits, it may be too late to save your placement. However, you can take some proactive steps to prevent your recruit from turning to the dark side and accepting a counteroffer.

Discuss the counteroffer early

Don't wait until the last minute to discuss the possibility of a counteroffer. Once you know a candidate is good for one or even multiple clients, you should discuss the person's current situation and how he or she feels about a counteroffer. Ask your recruit several questions to get a gauge on how he or she feels about his or her current employer. Use questions such as:

- What will your company do when you give your two weeks notice?
- How will your company react?
- What could your company do to provide you with a better opportunity than the one you're exploring with me?

Asking these probing questions will earn you a better understanding of how the candidate's current company may react.

Once you feel a candidate is right for a specific opportunity, you must get your recruit to perceive this new opportunity with your client's company as simply the next and best thing for him or her professionally and that he or she absolutely must take the new position. It is your job as a good recruiter to hear the recruit verbalize this to you in as implicit of terms as possible. You should hear this long before you make an offer. If you're not sure about how a recruit may answer, chances are he or she is not sure either.

Set expectations

Preparing a recruit for the possibility of a counteroffer is the best way to preserve the great work you've already done to find the right person for the open position. It's highly advisable to inform your recruit of what he or she may encounter in the event of a counteroffer. You need to act as an advisor and tell your recruit how an employer may put an arm around him or her and say they love or need them. They may offer to change an employee's title, create a new position, and even change the employee's work location and hours. Nothing is out of the realm of possibility, and you have to prepare your recruit for anything. You have to make sure your recruit understands that even though the company may be offering him or her more now, it doesn't change the reasons the person was willing to take a new job in the first place. The idea is to have your recruit say, "Yeah, the recruiter told me you might try this."

Ease the transition

Once your recruit has officially resigned by giving his or her two-week notice, give him or her support. Make your recruit feel comfortable with his or her decision. Tell your recruit to call you as soon as he or she resigns. You may even want to send a personalized card stating how excited your client is to have him or her on board and that you know your recruit may a great decision for his or her

future. The next two weeks can often be the longest and saddest two weeks of your recruit's working life, so do whatever it takes to show your recruit that his or her new company is the right choice.

Always expect the unexpected

Regardless of how well prepared your recruit is to reject a counteroffer, and regardless of how many times your recruit swore he or she would never accept one, your recruit is only human. Stay in close contact with your recruit for a few weeks after his or her official start date. This is the best way to avoid one of those dreaded, "You know, I've been thinking this over," phone calls.

In the end, being a good recruiter means doing everything you can to not only hook the "big fish" but also reel it in without too much of a struggle. Armed with the right tools and knowledge for preventing counteroffers, you could find yourself asking management to order you a bigger boat.