



# MAKING SENSE OF A RECRUITMENT PROCESS: THE INTRICATE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HEADHUNTER AND ITS CLIENT COMPANY

AN OFFICIAL CLIENT UPDATE OF PT HEADHUNTER INDONESIA



It was a bright Monday morning at the office. Andy, a junior headhunter at a local executive search firm, was ready to tackle his day, showing everyone in the office his palpable energy of possibility.

It wasn't even close to 9 am but Andy was already on the call with a potential candidate he has found in his company's talent database. The potential candidate—a seasoned and exuberant product management professional with more than a decade of experience in the industry across IT, Financial Services, and E-Commerce—was a perfect candidate for an executive position at Andy's client.

After assessing the candidate's career trajectory and his career preferences for the first thirty minutes of the call, it was time for Andy to disclose the company he was recruiting for. As he told the candidate about the profile of his client company, suddenly, the candidate said:

*"I'm sorry to interrupt this discussion, but I heard bad things about your client. Employee turnover is high because of their bad work culture. I'm sorry but I'm not interested in your client."*

As a persistent headhunter, Andy was not easily discouraged by one rejection. In the next three hours, he called three potential candidates for the same assignment and they all rejected Andy's offer for the same reason as the first candidate.

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The day that Andy thought would be easy and kind has turned out to be gloomy.

Headhunters are driven to help clients to find talents to elevate their businesses. However, companies often have other issues that could be contributing factors to their inability to find talents that fit their expectations, such as lousy employer branding, high turnover caused by toxic workplace culture, and unrealistic ideal candidates.

Ironically, not all companies are aware that they have those problems. Even if they are aware, sometimes they don't think those issues are urgently needed to be addressed.

When a company is having one or all of those issues mentioned above and puts a high expectation on a headhunter firm to find the best candidate for them, I think the chance of successfully hiring the right talent is slim.

Top talents, people who have more choices and control over their careers, are less likely interested in joining a company with broken working culture, regardless of how effective the persuasion is coming from the headhunter.

With the internet at our fingertips, it's easy to investigate how one company positions its brands compared to other companies. Online company reviews are now readily available everywhere, making it easier for potential candidates to do an initial background check.

When a headhunter firm has agreed to help a company without being aware of its toxic workplace culture in the beginning, they might face countless rejections from their potential candidates, resulting in unfulfilled expectations for the client company. Then, in the end, usually comes blame from both of the parties.

I'm not interested in the question of who is to blame. I'm more interested in the question that is mature and invites us to be thoughtful such as: *what is the wisest way to get our minds around this recruitment challenge?*

When it comes to the relationship between a headhunter and a company, there are three important principles that they all must pay attention to:

## Recruitment is a Collaborative Process

Recruitment is a highly collaborative task, whether you are working as an in-house recruiter or as a headhunter.

Collaborative means having two-way conversations with the user or hiring manager. It's not built on the principle of giving and receiving orders. Sadly, this is a practice that many people seem to forget. When a client thinks that they are too busy to give effective feedback to a headhunter and expects a headhunter to read their mind, the result will be nil.

Of course, a headhunter must also believe and practice the same thing. Sometimes a headhunter finds new information about his client from his potential candidates that might surprise him.

This is a chance for a headhunter to take this piece of new data seriously and investigate it objectively with his team. When the time is right, he should consider sharing the new data with his client and sit together to make sense of it, allowing them to adjust their expectations accordingly.

**Bersin by Deloitte**, a part of Deloitte that delivers research-based people strategies, reports that building a solid collaboration with a hiring manager will increase productivity and drive a smarter hiring decision.

## Maybe You Don't Need a Headhunter

The scenario that I drew about Andy's story reflects a company that, maybe, doesn't need the help of a headhunter yet.

From the outside, Andy's client may look like they need a headhunter to help fill an executive position. However, given the stories that Andy heard from his potential candidates about his client's toxic culture, first and foremost, they need to investigate the roots of the issues and solve them before start recruiting new hires.

**Manuela Priesemuth**, a professor and researcher whose research focuses on destructive leadership, workplace aggression, organizational fairness, and behavioral ethics, reports that the impacts of toxic workplace culture on employees are devastating, such as it lowers a team's ability to perform a task, destroys professional bonds between team members, lowers employees' wellbeing, and even drives conflicts at home.

Staggering research by **MIT Sloan Management Review** reports that toxic workplace culture is the highest driving factor of employee attrition during the Great Resignation.

Recruitment is not only about attracting and hiring the right talent but also about retention—providing a fertile ground for talents to blossom and contribute to the company.

It would be a waste of enormous resources to fill executive positions over and over using a headhunter if, in the end, the new hires decided to leave because of the company's toxic workplace.

## Mutual Assessment Between Company and Headhunter

Before a company is considering using the service of a headhunter, they must do extensive research about a list of potential headhunter firms.

Ideally, your potential headhunter should be your potential business partner, not just another recruitment vendor. A headhunter that understands what it takes to be a successful business partner will utilize his investigative and assessment techniques, business acumen, industry knowledge, and network to carefully identify the right professional for his client.

It's also about sharing the same values, trust, and accountability to work in a long-term partnership with his client.

A headhunter firm should also understand the characteristics of their ideal clients and be honest about their expertise. There's always a temptation to accept a client with a potential big billing only to realize later that the headhunter doesn't have enough resources to deliver the client's expectations.

As a result, the headhunter can lose its credibility as a firm. If the headhunter knows from the first meeting that he can't handle his client's requests—no matter how glamorous the brand or the paycheck will be—it's better to walk away with humility than continue the path that might lead him astray.

## Conclusion

Behind every relationship between a company and a headhunter, there is a candidate who chooses to resign from his job and happily decides to join the headhunter's client company in hopes of better career advancement.

Of course, we all want the candidate to have a successful career and the client is happy with his contributions.

But, what if it was the opposite? When a headhunter puts a candidate in a client's company whose culture is later to be found toxic and the candidate feels miserable, resigns shortly, and ends up losing a job—this is the price that we all could pay.

Investing in a headhunter could be your next strategic business move if you are having difficulty filling an executive position. However, a headhunter is not your superhero that can magically cater to all of your recruitment needs, especially if the roots of your difficulty in finding talents come from your inorganized internal organization.

No matter how much money you spend for the best headhunter in the world, if you don't take care of your organization first, the money will eventually go to waste.

Just like with your health problems. You could consult with every prestigious doctor in the world, but at the end of the day, the one who is responsible for your own health is you.

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