



Using Solution Selling with Executive Recruiters and Prospective Employers

by

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Companies around the world are facing a talent shortage. Baby Boomers are retiring at the rate of 10,000/day and their knowledge and experience are walking out the door. The talent gap they leave is a challenge to many organizations and—despite persistently high unemployment rates—new talent remains difficult to locate, recruit, hire, and retain.

In today's executive recruiting market, demand outstrips the supply of qualified talent. That's a big change for candidates like you who've been cautious in an economy that had embraced downsizing and avoided new hiring. But many companies now realize that they've cut to the bone and it's time to invest in future growth.

That's beneficial to you but it's not a panacea. Even the most talented candidates should still employ a disciplined and intelligent approach to finding advancement opportunities.

When working with candidates, I've embraced a time-tested approach historically used in sales and applied it to executive recruiting—Solution Selling. If you're considering your next career step and plan to work with an executive recruiter to find a prospective employer, I recommend understanding and employing Solution Selling as part of your own job search.

What is Solution Selling?

Originated by Frank Watts of Wang Laboratories in 1975 and patented by Mike Bosworth in 1982, [Solution Selling](#) is highly consultative. It eschews the aggressive sales stereotype and uses a diagnostic approach to deliver solutions to business problems. Isn't that what companies are looking for when making new hires—someone who can solve their problems? Solution Selling is a common-sense approach to the Golden Rule and its persistent success over many years speaks to its effectiveness.

A major reason for its success is Solution Selling's philosophy of mutual satisfaction. The salesperson-as-a-partner dynamic creates long-term relationships. It's not content to simply trigger a transaction and generate a commission. It seeks to identify the threats to success for companies and mutually agreeing to how to solve those threats, while demonstrably measuring the effectiveness of those solutions. You don't sell a car and have the buyer drive away caveat emptor; you ensure customer satisfaction by following up and paving the way for ongoing service agreements. Such an approach forges partnerships that deliver bottom-line results for both the buyer and the seller.



The same principles apply to your career advancement.

The principle of mutual satisfaction applies to your career advancement as well.

Solution Selling Helps You Select The Right Recruiter

We all want to find work at the right place. Consistently successful companies have a longer time-horizon than those who prioritize quarterly results. Successfully obtaining careers in companies like these requires finding an executive recruiter with a few very important traits, traits often-touted but rarely fully embraced. These three traits stand out as critically important.

- *Excellent listening*

A complaint that I often hear from candidates is that recruiters seem to ignore what is truly important to them. Recruiters hear what you're saying but they don't truly listen. Listening carefully and applying Solution Selling effectively distinguishes a recruiter who can achieve your objectives from one whose main focus is to generate a commission.

- *Distinctive solutions; not templated processes*

As with poor listening skills, candidates are highly critical of recruiters who talk about their personalized approach while they follow the same template they've used with scores of others. For these recruiters, volume = success and they rarely deviate. It's a short-term approach. Adding real value in recruiting requires a truly personalized approach. It may take more time and generate less short-term revenue. It may even require telling you something that you don't want to hear. But a true candidate-centric approach forges long-term relationships between you and the recruiter and is the most effective dynamic for making a smart career move.

- *Relationships; not transaction*

Relationships matter. Finding the right career opportunity for you requires a disciplined, systematic strategy from a recruiter. And your relationship shouldn't end when the contract is signed. A good recruiter doesn't pester but does keep in touch. Systematic follow-up increases the likelihood that you begin your next assignment on a positive note. It also ensures that you and your recruiter maintain ongoing communication around company changes, innovations, strategic priorities, and talent needs. That sustained interaction—only possible with a candidate-first approach—creates ongoing opportunities between you and the recruiter.

If you and the recruiter are interested in long-term benefits, in long-term relationships, then Solution Selling offers multiple advantages. The most important is that premier executive recruiters are not just lining up interviews like dating service matchmakers. They're selling solutions to a company on your behalf.

It's personalized. It's sincere. It's effective.

Solution Selling also works for you and your recruiter when marketing your services to potential employers. The following are five tactics that I recommend to utilize Solution Selling in finding the best career opportunity for you.

Your Value Proposition

Solution Selling can help you create your own value propositions—your reason for being and a promise that you make to a potential employer to solve a problem. A value proposition:

- Defines what you bring to an organization
- Explains the types of problems you can solve and what makes you distinctive
- Connects you to the companies and organizations that would most benefit from your experience and skill sets

Your value proposition should differentiate you to prospective employers and is something you should request assistance in developing from an executive recruiter.

Listen; Truly Listen

Just as you want a recruiter to listen to you; it's important that you listen to them. Their experience and external perspectives are valuable and a reputable recruiter may reveal something that—for better or for worse—you don't see yourself. Appreciate the importance of that perspective.

Keep the Lines of Communication Open

The recruiting/interviewing/hiring process is no longer a closed loop. With the web and social media playing an increasingly important role in hiring, your recruiter should be highly transparent. Insist upon timely updates and be sure to do the same with your recruiter when you have news. The closer you work together as a seamless team, the more potent your efforts will be in making your case in the employment marketplace.

Common-Sense Etiquette

Politeness is not out of style. It helps distinguish you in a scarce talent marketplace. It requires a little extra effort but the impact of these small nuances can tip the scales in your favor. What goes around comes around when dealing with potential employers and your recruiter.

- If your handwriting is even remotely legible, use hand-written notes to thank a potential employer for the interview while reiterating the solutions you bring to the position.
- Make sure that you have your recruiter's cell phone number and text them updates as you're heading into an interview and immediately thereafter. Call them if you've found new opportunities or heard problems about a prospective employer.
- Write a letter of recommendation or referral for your recruiter when you land the right job. Taking a few moments to compose a sincere letter is an important third party endorsement of their professionalism and will help keep you on that recruiter's radar for future career opportunities.

Over-deliver

Expect your recruiter to exceed your expectations and hold yourself to the same high standard. Doing so will increase your odds of obtaining a desirable career opportunity. Expect your future employer to be on time for meetings, answer your questions candidly, and be transparent about the hiring process. Expect your recruiter to clearly outline the pros and cons of specific opportunities by providing an intelligent, unvarnished perspective on the organization you're considering, explaining how this position contributes to your clearly-stated career goals. Settle for nothing less.

And hold yourself to the same high standards. Exceed expectations.

Conclusion

The demand for transcendent talent exceeds the supply. A professional and capable executive recruiter can help you leverage this new dynamic to your benefit. Solution Selling is a long-term approach to working with recruiters and potential employers to help you achieve your career objectives. Using Solution Selling to finding the right recruiter and marketing yourself to future employers is a credible and time-tested approach to obtaining the opportunities you seek.

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