



Paul Pompeo

You're busy at work, or possibly at home, and your thoughts are probably miles away from the phone call you're about to receive. Yes, the recruiter's call—that mysterious voice, seemingly out of nowhere, calling you regarding a position they've been engaged to assist in filling.

Executive recruiters are sometimes perceived as a very mysterious, shadowy breed, as if they are part of some covert operation. But actually, they are not that mysterious at all. This month I'm going to attempt to not only "lift the veil," but to demystify the call you receive from an executive recruiter. So what do you do when your (hopefully) friendly neighborhood recruiter calls? It's not something we're taught in college. Here are a few tips to hopefully aid in making the next call that you take from a recruiter that much more comfortable, as well productive, for you.

First off—a recruiter should initially ask you if it's a bad time to speak, or if you can speak confidentially. This indicates a respect and appreciation for your current position. You should also get a sense of professionalism and confidentiality when you speak with a recruiter—most industries are actually small in many ways, and the lighting and electrical sector most definitely fits that bill.

It is important to realize that most recruiters will not identify the name of the company on the initial call. There are exceptions here, but most will give you a basic description of the position and responsibilities, and ask either if you know of anyone, or if you, yourself, would be interested. It's important to realize that companies who use the services of a recruiter often, but not always, prefer that their company name not be used in the general recruiting effort until the time of confirming your actual interview with the company for several reasons:

1) The position may be a confidential replacement of an incumbent. This is probably the most sensitive of issues and therefore

broadcasting this information would not be appropriate and also would be insensitive to the person currently holding the position. It could be a case where the person will be moved into another position; sometimes it is because the incumbent will be let go.

2) The company may not want to telegraph their move to competitors. Especially in the case of a newly created position, a company may want to keep the search as low-profile as possible in order to prevent other companies in their niche from knowing their plans and to prevent them from being able to employ immediate counter-strategies.

Ironically,
those who are
least willing
to talk
with a
recruiter
are those
individuals at
the lower
rungs of the
organizational
chart

3) Often the reason a company uses the services of an executive search firm in the first place is to avoid having their manager(s) spend valuable time screening people who might not even be qualified. If the company has posted their position on the web, this subjects their manager to sifting through sometimes hundreds of responses—unfortunately, most of those responses are from people who not only are not from our industry, but whose backgrounds don't even remotely resemble the stated qualifications of the position. This is not uncommon, and smart companies often want to spare their manager the chore of wasting their time in tasks that probably

aren't even related to their reason for being hired.

Name Dropping

Often, when called at work by a recruiter, you may not be able to speak freely. A good recruiter, if calling you at work, will immediately ask if you are able to talk confidentially. If the recruiter doesn't explain how he got your name, feel free to ask how he or she was referred to you. This helps you to identify if a recruiter was actually referred to you by a colleague or industry peer, or is working off some sort of database. One is not necessarily better than the other, but it is always helpful to know so you can put the call into appropriate context. Realize that if a specific individual referred a recruiter to you, the recruiter may or may not be able to disclose that person's name. Often people refer recruiters to someone not necessarily because they think that the person is looking, but because they think he or she fits the background of the position as described. Because of that, they may not be willing to give authorization to the recruiter to use their name.

Because of the nature of the call, take time to assess your comfort level with the recruiter (if you've not spoken before). Does he come across as professional? Does she seem to be discreet, and respect the confidentiality of the matter? These are sometimes almost immediate judgement calls you have to make, but it is important for you to feel comfortable with the professionalism, integrity, and confidentiality of the recruiter calling you. If you don't, you may want to refer people to that individual, but you may or many not want to entrust your personal career information and goals to this particular person.

If the recruiter asks you for your recommendations but doesn't ask you if you're interested, they may not be sure if you're a fit for the position, or it just may be his/her approach. Don't be shy about expressing interest if you feel the

position is intriguing and fits your background.

Don't blow off the recruiter. We find that the higher up individuals are in an organization and the more savvy, the more they are willing and open to take the call of an executive recruiter. Ironically, those who are least willing to talk with a recruiter are those individuals at the lower rungs of the organizational chart. Even more ironic is that the person at this level often doesn't feel they have a need to take the call, as they believe they are very highly paid for their position without even allowing themselves the chance to actually compare the prospective opportunity to their current position. Conversely, the higher up an individual in an organization, chances are she/he got there because they are always looking to see if there is a better way to achieve results—and they apply this to their career as well as fulfilling the responsibilities of their current position. Also, let's say the position either doesn't fit your background at all, or is of no interest to you. If the recruiter comes across as professional, it is beneficial for you to establish a rapport with the person. Even if the current opportunity doesn't float your boat, you want to have the doors of communication open so that they definitely think of you when they have their next suitable opportunity.

Although our industry continues to grow, with the never-ending company mergers and acquisitions, in some ways it's actually getting smaller and smaller. So, finding a professional and discreet executive recruiter and cultivating a long-term relationship can potentially reap great benefits for you and your career.

Paul Pompeo is principal with the Pompeo Group, Albuquerque, NM, a leading executive recruiting firm in the lighting and electrical industry. Pompeo had spent 16 years with Search West Inc. before starting his own firm in March 2003. He can be reached at paul@pompeo.com or www.pompeo.com.