ASK ELLEN – what can a recruiter do for me?

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Q: I am job-hunting law librarian [not a new grad], and a former colleague suggested I contact some info-pro recruiters to help with my job search. I contacted two, and submitted my resume to them. I met with one of them once, but I haven’t heard from either of them in over a month. I know I must be qualified for some of the positions they know about. How exactly is this supposed to work? I don’t seeing how contacting these recruiters is beneficial to me.

A: Well, to start with, your idea of what a recruiter does is not accurate. It is not a recruiter’s role “to help with [your] job search”.

Recruiters don’t find positions for people, they find people for positions (see also #7: “Why Your Networking May Not Be Working”). They are paid by employers to find suitable candidates for specific jobs. They will talk to, accept resumes from and perhaps meet with a number of info pros, but they will only call you if they feel you are a possible strong candidate for a position they are trying to fill.

Regarding how you feel you are qualified for some open positions, and frustrated that you haven’t been called by the recruiters: you may be qualified as far as the necessary education, experience and skills for the position, but what makes someone a good candidate from a recruiter’s point of view involves much more than those things. Keep in mind that a recruiter’s reputation, and therefore his/her future success, is at stake each time s/he recommends a candidate to an employer. If an employer doesn’t believe the recruiter has good judgment, the recruiter won’t be hired or retained in the future, to fill other positions.

Among the additional things a recruiter will take into account are: appearance/attire, verbal/presentation skills, interviewing skills, honesty, enthusiasm/confidence/positivity, professional activities outside of work, and whether that person is likely to succeed at that place of employment. Recruiters need to have a good idea of what the employer wants, including and beyond the “hard skills”, and the most successful recruiters can tell after a brief meeting with a candidate whether he or she will be a good fit for a particular job.

Recruiters also want to see that candidates are flexible and able to follow instructions. They need to know that someone they send to interview with a client will prepare and dress and behave appropriately, with no surprises. For example, if a recruiter asks you to make three specific changes to your resume, and you make only one (because you decide the other two things don’t need to be changed), the recruiter is unlikely to send you to an employer. An employee who insists on doing his/her “own thing” rather than following specific instructions, may be unpredictable in an interview and a problem if hired, and a recruiter just won’t want to take that chance.
The more you understand about how employment decision-makers (recruiters, hiring managers, hiring committees, HR staff, etc.) work, what they want and how they make their decisions, the better your chances of job hunting success will be. You should regard your contact with recruiters as one of a number of things you are doing to find a job, along with networking, applying directly to a number of jobs on an ongoing basis, being active in professional organizations, keeping your skills sharp and current, etc.

**LLAGNY’s list of NY area recruiters for information professionals**
http://www.aallnet.org/chapter/llagny/Library_Recruiters.html

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**Just for fun:** Unaired “Batgirl” pilot: “One minute a librarian… the next minute…”
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bDn1rfq5tQE

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Thank you,

Ellen Mehling  
Director, Westchester Program and Internships  
ellen.mehling@liu.edu