

Is It Worth Consulting a Headhunter?

A Blog of the Swiss Association of MBAs



LUCAS ZEHNDER
Author

Headhunters and recruitment agencies are plentiful. Here's how to find the right one and make the collaboration worthwhile.

Key Points:

- «Headhunter» is not a protected job title.
- An experienced headhunter offers access to the hidden job market.
- Collaboration with a headhunter should be long-term.
- Once you find a trusted headhunter, it pays to maintain the relationship.

Many people think of shady, cunning types when they hear «headhunter». They recall annoying LinkedIn messages or unwelcome office calls. Since «headhunter» isn't a protected title, many pop up, especially with the rise of LinkedIn, making it easier for the public to find interesting profiles online.

The reputation of headhunters hasn't always benefited from this. Nowadays, CVs are often shuffled around blindly, and personal contact has become impersonal, with some «headhunter» firms resembling casinos.

Why work with a Headhunter?

Access to the Hidden Job Market: Headhunters have confidential information and know the hidden job market. An experienced headhunter is your extended arm in the career world. They are experts in your industry and know the market and its people. Daily, they build new relationships and meet interesting people in your industry, connecting people to exciting job opportunities.



You can benefit from their network and count on an ally when the right opportunity arises.

Finding the right headhunter: In Switzerland, focus on smaller offices with long-standing expertise in your industry. Ensure they have senior staff with years of experience. Ultimately, the chemistry must be right. Find someone you can truly trust and enjoy conversing with—a sparring partner for your career.

Timing is Everything: Many run to a headhunter when they're already in panic mode after losing a job. Expecting the headhunter to quickly find a new job is unlikely. It's better to focus on two or three specialized offices during calm career phases, building a long-term relationship.

Maintaining the Relationship

It's worthwhile to maintain a relationship with your trusted headhunter. Through long-term collaboration, you get to know each other better. If your headhunter knows you well and the right job comes across their desk, they'll think of you. Call your headhunter occasionally or meet for a coffee, informing them of your latest developments.

In a long-term relationship, you walk a shared path, forming a cooperation that leads to success.

Do's and Don'ts When Working with Headhunters

Working with a headhunter can significantly benefit your career, but there are important points to consider.

Key Points:

- A good relationship with a headhunter is beneficial for your career.
- Follow certain rules when collaborating.
- Adhering to these rules gives you a powerful ally in the (hidden) job market.



Perhaps a headhunter has contacted you before—a LinkedIn message, an office call, then a secret coffee meeting while colleagues think you have a dentist appointment. A good relationship with a trusted headhunter is essential for advancing your career. However, there are certain "Do's and Don'ts" to keep in mind.

For Whom Does the Headhunter Work?

Important: The paying client of a headhunter is not the candidate but the company with a vacancy. Many job seekers mistake the headhunter for an agent who should run around the job market for them. This is not their job. Most people only think of their headhunter when they've just lost their job, expecting them to find a suitable position immediately. This is very unlikely.

Maintain Long-Term Relationships: Maintain a long-term relationship with your trusted headhunter, not just when warning lights are flashing.

Follow Communication Protocols: As in any company, adhering to communication protocols with your headhunter is crucial. If you're in an ongoing recruitment process, the headhunter is your contact, not the company—unless otherwise agreed. Ignoring the communication protocol can land you on a quality headhunter's blacklist and often leads to rejection.

Avoid Duplications: Inform your headhunter if you have previously applied to a company, providing specific dates and outcomes. If working with multiple headhunters, know exactly who presents your documents where. If your dossier reaches a company from multiple sources, the risk of rejection is high and it makes everyone look unprofessional. Avoid duplications that you, as a candidate, least desire.

Adhere to Agreements: Set salary expectations and availability with your headhunter and stick to them. Demanding fantasy salaries during an interview increases rejection risk and damages credibility. Always remain transparent and adhere to agreements. Trust your headhunter, so they become more accurate in finding new job options without unpleasant surprises.

Maintain Etiquette: Never underestimate the power of basic courtesy and diplomacy. Impatience or excessive pushiness can quickly disqualify you. Even if you don't get the job, thank the company and headhunter for their time. They'll remember you when the next opportunity arises.

Be Discreet: In any recruitment process, you'll receive sensitive, internal information that shouldn't be disclosed. Everyone involved counts on your confidentiality. Boasting about internal matters at a cocktail party is self-destructive.

Final Tip: Turn to a smaller, specialized headhunter boutique. Avoid sending your resume generically to many impersonal recruitment firms. Make «your» headhunter your ally.

About the Author

Lucas Zehnder has been placing and coaching professionals and executives at all levels since 2012, gaining insight into the job market's inner workings. He studied social psychology in Zurich (MSc University of Zurich, 2011) and has been a Senior Consultant since August 2020 and a Partner since February 2024 at Rockstar Recruiting, a DeepTech recruiting agency in Switzerland.

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/lucaszehnder/>