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Recruiting in a Virtual World: Q&A with Lori Carpenter of Carpenter Legal Search, Inc.

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With the impact of COVID-19 and the transition to remote working for many industries, how is recruiting for your clients different? What remains the same?

Albeit there have been more interviews from start to finish for a completely virtual search, it has been a much more “personal” experience for both our clients and candidates. Instead of conducting interviews in a conference room, often with multiple interviewers, people are connecting one-on-one virtually from individual personal spaces. It is a good opportunity for both our clients and candidates to go deeper during interviews, not only on a professional level but also on a personal level, showing more of their personalities and interests in a more tangible way than typically happens in an office setting. That is a very positive step for both parties to learn if the position is a good fit and if the organization is a good cultural fit as well.

Having virtual technology also makes the search process more personal for Carpenter Legal Search. We recruit nationally, and with recent cuts in travel expenditures, we would not have been able to make as many face-to-face connections with our clients or candidates. Our search process remains the same, and we are providing the same service; however, in many instances, the personal connection has been enhanced.

With people working from home, the availability of candidates to interview is greater as they have more flexibility to schedule personal time throughout the day. Virtual interviews are now more acceptable from a client perspective as well, whereas before the pandemic, interviewing in person at the client site was almost always required, particularly during the latter half of the search process. Additionally, candidates do not need to take a day or two off of work to interview as would have been necessary if they were traveling to interview at a client site. Unlike trying to schedule all interviews for a candidate during one day in a conference room, virtual interviews can be staggered so that it works for everyone’s schedule, and it makes it possible for a candidate to interview with a client’s global workforce in multiple locations.

How has Carpenter Legal Search adjusted to better serve their clients and candidates virtually?

Since our business was already in the cloud and we had the capability to conduct virtual interviews, we only needed to start utilizing that technology on a larger scale. Instead of just capitalizing on our virtual capabilities for those clients and candidates outside of our region, we now utilize it for those within our region as well. Even with quarantine measures, we have the opportunity to “meet” every candidate in person.

We also have been able to assist clients and candidates who are not used to virtual technology, facilitating interviews and offering insight. We give our candidates the opportunity to test the technology and are able to provide feedback to both parties on the virtual experience.

As we adjust to remote working along with the rest of the world, we are paying close attention to how we are operating and with whom we are working. We are remaining flexible and responsive to our clients’ needs as they evolve to meet their expectations and to continue to provide uncompromising personalized service.

What is one of the most positive things about conducting a completely virtual search?

Although interview scheduling is dependent on a client’s time frame and a candidate’s availability, the timespan for interviews is reduced because travel does not need to be arranged and all parties have greater flexibility. Time zone differences can be managed more easily, and a candidate has the opportunity to meet with more people in more client locations in a shorter span of time.

What would you say would be a point of caution for clients when conducting a virtual search?

The amount of time it takes to identify, interview, and determine which candidates to submit to a client has not diminished greatly. People are more accessible because they are working from home; however, the number of people with whom we speak in the recruiting phase of the search process has not decreased.

It may take a candidate time to warm up to accept an offer without tangibly seeing the office in which they will be working or physically meeting the people with whom they will be working. This is especially something to keep in mind for those candidates who are interviewing for a position for which they will need to relocate. Candidates generally will want to visit a location before committing to relocating, unless they are originally from that area.

We are becoming a much more mobile society. Clients need to be prepared to be asked if a position can be structured so that a person can work remotely. Many lawyers are now getting used to working remotely and may want to continue to do so. The client must be able to say definitively whether it is possible or not, depending on their needs, structure and the role itself. Expectations for someone to be in the office five days a week has gone away for many corporations and law firms. Additionally, allowing someone to work

remotely opens up a larger candidate pool than if you require someone to relocate.

What is one piece of advice that you would offer to candidates who are interviewing virtually?

Although you are interviewing from a personal space and have the opportunity to get to know someone on a more personal level, remember that you must maintain a level of professionalism. Test the technology ahead of time; do not assume that you will get it to work at the last minute. You need to “arrive early,” even in a virtual environment, so that you will be ready and prepared for your interviews.

Do not assume that virtual interviews are less important. You have an opportunity to have notes by your side to remind you of the things that you would like to convey to the person with whom you are interviewing. Be prepared to answer different sorts of questions than you might have previously in other interviews, including questions such as: “Describe a typical day in a work-from-home environment. How does that differ from your working style in the office six months ago?”

Make sure to get the appropriate person’s contact information for troubleshooting purposes in the event that the virtual interview does not function or an interviewer does not show. You need to be prepared for the unexpected. Someone’s internet can go out. Someone may be interrupted by children, a pet or a spouse. You have the opportunity to show flexibility, adaptability, understanding and professionalism.

Why is the role of a recruiter even more valuable in an economic recession?

All of our clients are dealing with new and/or different challenges on top of their existing responsibilities. Engaging Carpenter Legal Search to recruit top-tier lawyers for various roles in their legal departments allows our General Counsel and Human Resource clients to focus internally on their business and existing employee concerns. We focus on the external candidate market, recruiting passive candidates who are not looking for a new position while also handling the time intensive task of reviewing and evaluating resumes from the active pool of candidates to identify those who are on point in relation to the position. From our experience, we know that the overwhelming majority of resumes that we or our clients receive for a position from an internet posting will not be a fit.

We are actively marketing our clients on a national level as we recruit. As our client’s “face to the world,” we demonstrate that an organization is continuing to invest in its workforce and that it continues to be a viable employer that is economically sound.

Further, clients who continue to hire at this time are aware that it may be easier in some respects for a lawyer not to make a change currently; however, we are able to counsel our candidates to consider not only short-term advancement but also the long-term overall opportunity with our clients.

As a business owner who has weathered economic downturns, what is important to keep in mind during the recession and as we move forward into 2021?

Everything has a rise and fall; eventually, there will be an upswing. Keep working, and continue to do your best. Choose to be steady and of service. Innovate. Embrace the technology and other methodologies that facilitate better working arrangements. Try not to stay in the same mind frame, and open yourself to new possibilities. Continue to cultivate your existing relationships with clients that have supported you, and support them in return. Evaluate where the business will be for you in the coming months and years ahead. Continue to market. Learn from this recession, and prepare for the next one. Be fiscally responsible, and do not over extend in good times.

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