

Introduction

Recruiters earned this reputation

Fifty-three per cent of people have left jobs or considered leaving their job because they think that their employers don't recruit or retain high-performing individuals.¹ The recruiter's job is pivotal to the success of the company yet our poor reputation is causing our own undoing.

In an attempt to save time and fill roles fast, recruiters have inadvertently turned the market against themselves so that now, in 2019, the market belongs to the people. People who don't like recruiters, people who don't want to reply to recruiters and people who are beginning to pay recruiters back.

Putting technology first and the human last was never going to create a positive outcome for recruiters, even if it was unintentional. For too long recruiters have used technology to spam, disrespect, ghost and even reject; using technology to cut the wrong corners, they have left people cold.

Encouraged by HR and recruitment technology providers, recruiters have irritated people with their bulk messages about irrelevant roles to the point that people have created the hashtags #recruiter-spam and #recruiterfail, and a subreddit on Reddit called recruiting hell, to express their annoyance.² Recruiters have used technology to spray jobs onto social media, confusing it with an online job board; used technology to unveil email addresses to send me, me, me emails; and used technology to auto-post irrelevant content that ignores the etiquette of social media.

It is time to turn it around.

We are people

It was easy to decide upon *The Robot-Proof Recruiter* as the title for this book because I strongly believe that a human-first approach will make you irreplaceable by artificial intelligence and robots. It is true though, there is some incredible technology around, and some of it can even do a part of your job but throughout this book, I will show you how to put the human first and keep the technology in its supporting role so that you can drastically improve your human engagement and response rates.

This book is not written for high-volume recruitment. In fact, I have little expertise in high volume or early career recruitment. My expertise and experience are squarely in recruiting difficult-to-find, engage and recruit people, people who possess skills that are in demand. I have written this book for people recruiting people who will only respond to a high-quality human-first approach.

HR and recruitment industry jargon removes the human from the equation. People are not an acquisition, passive talent, active talent, human capital, a resource, a candidate, in-demand talent, talents, unicorns, purple squirrels, targets, perfect fits and other worse dysphemisms that I would prefer not to repeat. Nor are recruiters or sourcers job whisperers, talent magnets, unicorn hunters, career matchmakers, career whisperers or headhunters; recruiters are also people, helping other people secure their next job, contract or project.

For the sake of understanding though, throughout the book, I have used the industry terms that are easy to relate to including recruiter, sourcer, hiring manager, applicant, candidate, interviewee, employee and so on. I hope though that when you read the industry jargon that you remember that I really mean ‘a human being with thoughts and feelings’.

I have used the term recruiter loosely to cover in-house recruiters, talent acquisition, HR, recruitment agents, staffing companies, sourcers, resourcers, researchers and anyone who is involved in the recruitment life cycle.

To agency recruiters, this book may sound like it is written for in-house recruiters and that is because, for brevity, I have used

‘company’ instead of using ‘company, agency or client’ or ‘company or agency’ and so on. The chapters that may seem exclusive to companies are still worth your time, especially if you wish to be consultative to your clients about managing their reputation and employer branding.

Transparency can hinder recruitment

When I started in my first full-time job 28 years ago, I had a manager who reduced me to tears regularly and who stressed out his second-in-charge so greatly that she used to be sick each lunchtime. He was deeply unpleasant but we stayed because the internet was yet to create transparency. In 1990, I couldn’t see the thousands of jobs and the fear of being jobless was greater than the atmosphere in that office.

Fast-forward nearly three decades and technology has empowered the job seeker. For example, Olivia Bland, who took to Twitter on 29 January 2019 to share feedback about her interview with Web Applications UK.³ She wrote, ‘After a brutal 2 hour interview, in which the CEO tore both me and my writing to shreds (and called me an underachiever), I was offered the job’ and attached a copy of her email to the company politely declining the offer. She did not feel that being made uncomfortable to the point of tears in an interview was appropriate.

What happened next is more damaging to the company’s future recruitment. The story was picked up by the media, including the national press, and Olivia was soon to be heard on BBC Radio and TV.⁴ Her tweet has also now been retweeted over 42,000 times.

Being inquisitive, I looked the company up on employer review site Glassdoor and was soon reading a review from 2016 that supported Olivia’s claims of bullying. It wasn’t the review that stood out but the reply by the CEO which started condescendingly with ‘Are you sure you worked here?’ and went downhill from there.

Putting aside your thoughts on Glassdoor and whether you think the reviews hold relevance or not, if you visit Web Applications UK’s Glassdoor page, you will see the aforementioned review is now marked helpful by 122 people.⁵ You will also find new reviews that

have been found helpful by hundreds of people, including one that states ‘I came here to post this after seeing the Twitter thing about that woman who was abused in an interview. I wanted people to know that everything she said was true.’

In the future, this company will have difficulty recruiting because of the impact of these reviews and their mention in the national press. In Chapter 4, you will hear how to handle reviews and balance them out genuinely so this doesn’t happen to your company or client.

Technology hindering recruitment

Finding people isn’t hard. There are so many tools available to use, from paid LinkedIn Recruiter licences to free Chrome add-ons. For too long the emphasis has been placed on using tools to find people and little on how to engage, which has caused an excessive amount of recruiter spam and a decrease in response rates. In this book, I am focusing on showing you how to engage people so they respond, I am asking you to use technology better and to take a little extra time up front so you save yourself hours later trying to find and engage with yet more people.

Pondering the state of sourcing for 2019, technical recruiter Mark Mansour tweeted, ‘People fighting for the same people, businesses not investing in hiring on potential, CEOs still lying and saying talent is the most important thing for the upcoming year. Oh, and recruiters still too reliant on LinkedIn!’⁶

LinkedIn isn’t always the answer

If you have followed my journey, it will come as no surprise that I don’t drink LinkedIn’s Kool-Aid. If LinkedIn spent as much time as Facebook does keeping people active on the platform before selling recruiters its user data, and if LinkedIn hadn’t convinced recruiters that all people on the platform are looking for a job, then I may think differently.

LinkedIn has the lowest active user base after Facebook, Instagram, QZone, Reddit, Twitter and Douban yet it is the place recruiters can

be found in greatest abundance due to a combination of LinkedIn's marketing and ease of searching.⁷ But due to the large volume of irrelevant recruiter InMails, people with skills that are in great demand prefer to avoid the site or visit infrequently.

Sadly, it is not hard to find people mocking misguided LinkedIn messages. Rupert Murdog is a blog that starts with 'I'm a dog. I'm on LinkedIn. Sometimes recruiters contact me.'⁸ Rupert shares examples of the messages he receives and it is a fine example of where automation has been too heavily relied upon. Though difficult to read without laughing, it is this noise that you are now trying to be heard over.

But even the best hyperpersonalized LinkedIn InMail, one that shows there was human input, can fall on deaf ears. In 2016, Paul Fenwick shared a tweet with a screenshot of an InMail he had received from Weston Fillman at Google.⁹ The InMail included skills that were buried deep in Paul's LinkedIn profile and he called it 'Gold'. What struck me though was that it had taken Paul 10 months to open LinkedIn and see the message. The InMail was dated 13 July 2015 and seen on 11 May 2016, and though Weston and Paul did end up speaking, by sending the message on the wrong platform they had both lost a great opportunity.

In Chapter 5 on intake strategy sessions, you will hear about recruiting personas, which can help you discover where your future employees are most active so your messages are successful.

People use tech against recruiters

So big is the problem of recruiter spam caused by the wrong kind of automation, that people are using technology to ignore recruiters, some have even created bots to deal with the volume of irrelevant messages. At Reply.id you can supercharge your inbox with a free AI Gmail filter. They state 'You won't see any more recruiting emails in your inbox with our AI Gmail filter & autoresponder.' Emails are filtered to a subfolder and the autoresponder replies to recruiters asking them to answer questions, mostly about the relevance of the skills and location to the recipient. It is incredibly clever and easy to use but how sad that someone felt the need to create it in the first place.

Technology obstacles

Ever had a call from a robot? I received one yesterday about my non-existent ‘car accident’ that was obviously fake. It was annoying and it reminded me of the technology providers who will tell you that a bot can cold engage with people and successfully receive a response.

Don’t get me wrong, bots do have their place and you will hear how Zalando and Yodel use chatbots to keep people engaged but these are people who have successfully arrived on their careers websites, they are not people avoiding contact with recruiters because they have been treated poorly for so long. These people deserve the extra effort and a human touch.

Recruiters know that referred applicants are the best quality of hire but do people know that they need to be referred to a company to get around a broken applicant tracking system (ATS)? In ‘I applied to 13 top tech companies in Silicon Valley’, software developer Tony Mai shared that initially his application to Airbnb was rejected by automated email but that ‘I later realized I knew someone who works at Airbnb and reached out to him for a referral. I got contacted the next day and my Airbnb process went all the way to the onsite interviews.’¹⁰ If Tony had not been proactive, this wouldn’t have happened. Is your ATS stopping you from hiring great people?

Attitude obstacles

Technology highlights people’s behaviour online. I appreciate my view of recruiter behaviour comes down to the network of people I have built and what LinkedIn, for example, chooses to show me but I don’t think that I will be alone in being shocked by the increase in recruiters shaming and even bullying other recruiters and candidates online. Besides being damaging to their own reputations, and clearly visible in the activity section of their profile, it is also damaging to the industry as a whole. It creates yet more noise for great recruiters to battle through when trying to engage with people who are in demand.

There is no reason to mock candidates like this, ‘If you’re really looking to annoy the recruiter who’s looking at your CV definitely write curriculum vitae at the top. Using four different fonts is a real

winner too.’ Instead, this recruiter could have given some great advice to job seekers that reflected well on her and her agency. In the next few chapters, you will hear more about the social media etiquette that helps grow a great community of interested people.

Recruiter behaviour + transparency = candidate ghosting

Ghosting is defined as the practice of ending a personal relationship with someone by suddenly and without explanation withdrawing from all communication.¹¹ There is an increase in candidate ghosting, where people disappear out of the hiring process and this is due to the buoyant job market, poor recruiter behaviour that has created disloyalty, and the ease with which people can keep looking for jobs or be approached about another job during the recruitment process.

Whenever I hear recruiters complaining about candidate ghosting I am surprised that they do not realize that recruiters have been ghosting candidates for years. Recruiters are known to not acknowledge applications, not return phone calls or emails, not deliver feedback after interviews and even not turn up for the interview.

It is easy to find examples of recruiter ghosting causing resentment online. On Twitter, consultant Valeska Magalhaes shared ‘I hate it when they schedule a phone interview and don't show up or when they invite me for an interview at the company with two people and both are on vacation.’¹² In his article ‘Have you been “ghosted” by an employer?’ software engineer Yechiel Kalmenson shared ‘I’ve had one company where they had me take a full day off work unpaid, so I could come to their office for an interview, only to never hear back and get no replies to my emails. I’ve had a friend who was ghosted after getting an offer!’¹³ There are many comments from other developers, people possessing skills that are in high demand, sharing similar experiences and it is disappointing.

I feel Jordan Stewart’s tweet sums up the way recruiters and hiring managers have been treating people the best, ‘I had a 4 hour interview for a job, and the manager flew in from Florida to meet me and I never heard back from them. It is a different world.’¹⁴

This won't be the last time I mention ghosting, in Chapter 8 you will hear how to reduce the likelihood of people ghosting you in this candidate-driven market, and in Chapter 3 I will share the impact of not delivering feedback on ghosting. It deserves your attention because it is one of the biggest factors negatively impacting hiring.

Human first, technology second

In the 2019 HMC Trend Report, Principal Analyst Ben Eubanks expects a greater focus on the actual, practical impacts of artificial intelligence and shared concerns about over-automation, 'employers must be cautious about over-automating and potentially compromising the experience for candidates, employees, and customers.'¹⁵ In my experience, automation has already damaged the reputation of recruiters and reduced candidate engagement, and recruiters need drastic action to put the human first and become robot-proof.

If you skip to the messaging chapter of this book, you will miss the formula that increases response rates, engages people through the whole hiring process and eases the pain of recruitment. The internet has created incredible transparency and it has given people access to information about your company or client that was hidden in the past.

Today a recruiter's job is not as simple as it used to be; today if you want to be heard in the 2.5 quintillion bytes of data produced each day, it takes all the elements below.¹⁶ There are no shortcuts to the results, skip any, and your response rates and engagement will remain the same or worsen in the years ahead.

Over the course of the book you will learn why today recruiters now need to:

- be candidate-centric (human first);
- look worthy of someone's time under internet scrutiny;
- ensure their hiring managers and company also look good under review;
- conduct exceptional intake strategy sessions;
- create human-first job posts and messages;
- have efficient application, interview and rejection processes;

- ensure that people are taken care of during pre- and onboarding; and
- even ensure people are off boarded well for potential boomerang or referral hires.

It may seem overwhelming when you have a pile of requirements to fill and a hiring manager breathing down your neck, but I will also share the technology that you can use to support you in all these areas. Today, candidate engagement is at an all-time low and you can no longer ignore the change technology has created, you must embrace it.

Let me show you how to put the human first and technology second.

Notes

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- 3 Tweet from Olivia Bland [accessed 11 April 2019] Twitter [Online] <https://twitter.com/oliviaabland/status/1090281095805980672> (archived at <https://perma.cc/P6KT-BPNY>)
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- 5 Employee reviews for Web Applications UK [accessed 11 April 2019] Glassdoor [Online] <https://www.glassdoor.co.uk/Reviews/Employee-Review-Web-Applications-UK-RVW12360906.htm> (archived at <https://perma.cc/L98N-GMVL>)
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- 10 Mai, T (2019) [accessed 11 April 2019] I applied to 13 top tech companies in Silicon Valley – talked to 9 – got onsite interviews at 5 – and offers from 3 of them, Medium, 20 February [Online] <https://medium.com/@thetonymai/i-applied-to-13-top-tech-companies-in-silicon-valley-talked-to-9-got-onsite-interviews-at-5-22c7d5824095> (archived at <https://perma.cc/YQ7J-X7U3>)
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- 12 Tweet from Valeska Magalhaes [accessed 11 April 2019] Twitter [Online] https://twitter.com/Val_Mag/status/1048118342006067200 (archived at <https://perma.cc/FJ4B-8BW6>)
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