

The Fordyce Letter

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STRAIGHT TALK FOR THE RECRUITING PROFESSION FOR OVER 30 YEARS

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Thoughts About Tenure

By Neil McNulty

The hotel ballroom was packed. At least 500 recruiters and their spouses were at this regional awards banquet for a major search and placement company. After dinner, and before the featured speaker, the MC announced, "Everyone who works a desk full time, please stand up."

Billing managers were included in this group; non-billing owners/managers remained seated. The MC then announced, "Everyone who has worked a desk for less than 12 months, please sit down." At least *half* of the total standing sat down.

Then, the MC ordered, "All who have worked a desk for less than five years, please sit down."

Another 150 or so sat down. The number left standing was now somewhere between 100 and 125 recruiters.

The MC then decided to get serious: "All who have worked a desk for less than *10 years*, sit down."

Now the major reduction had occurred, and the number standing was down to 19 people of the original 500. The audience began to make noise.

The MC asked that only those who have worked a desk for at least 15 years remain standing. Only six remained...to thunder-

ous applause from the audience.

I was one of the six, but I felt uneasy being counted in this group. Why? Because I wondered what I was "missing" by being one of the few who actually stay in this business for a long time.

The "last man standing" that night with the longest tenure was the legendary Mitch Oakley, billing manager and owner of Management Recruiters of Greensboro, North Carolina, a storied MR franchise that consistently put up phenomenal numbers year after year. I don't know if Mitch is still in this business, but his office's success in the 1980s and 1990s was due primarily to his leadership; a man who pushed himself to produce at least 40K per month from his own desk, month after month, year in, year out.

Back then, those were unheard-of numbers, and Mitch's recruiters followed his lead, helping MR Greensboro to win MR's "Office of the Year" award on more than just a few occasions.

The dinner described above occurred in 1998, so I guess I am now what some would call an "old timer." At 52, I am not very old, but having begun in this industry at 26 as an account executive, I guess I'm old by our industry's

standards. I have also always worked a desk full time, and do so more as a way to remain credible when I teach others, so I can honestly say “I feel your pain” and they believe me.

Why is it that very few stay at this for more than 10 or 15 years? Well, if we all look in the mirror and are honest, we need to admit that this is one *tough* business, and it can and will wear people out.

The highs are outweighed by the lows on a three-to-one (or more) ratio (three sendouts for one placement...if we are *good*). We live each day on emotional rollercoasters; one phone call we are heroes, the next phone call we are goats.

Also, what can be fun about cold calling? (I don't care how many “clients” you have in this business, you must always cold call or you will end up out of this business). Nonetheless, over time, you learn to remain focused on the strategic picture, not the daily ups and downs, and you become desensitized to the pain in this business.

What has always left me most disappointed is that this business tends to create people who become supremely egotistical with “know it all” attitudes. Many great folks are around, but there remain too many who feel the need to prove they are better at this than all others, when there is *nothing to prove*. Ego is critical to success in our business, but there are far too many people who think “there is nothing you can teach me which I don't already know” or “I have been a top biller at this five years and I know how to do this!”

As only one example of this unfortunate phenomenon: Recently, I wrote a *TFL* article inviting people to learn how to do

what I have been doing for over 23 years: placing transitioning military people, and doing so by geographic preferences.

Many formerly successful yet now struggling tenured recruiters have contacted me, interested in my program, yet trying to pick my brain to obtain enough clues to figure out how to do what I do without me. (I have been around long enough to know when to stop giving out information.)

I don't blame them for trying to do something without having to pay someone, and I wish them luck. But there are so many nuances to military placement that will bite them hard, making my minimal fee insignificant compared to the business they will generate if I teach them. They would say they are trying to save money. I think it is just simply too tough for them to admit they need to be taught something new. My best students are recruiters who have less than two years in the business because they do not try to prove they know more than the person teaching them.

The great trainers are the ones who have long tenure but will also freely admit they don't “know it all.” A great example is Bob Marshall, a legend in his own right who has been in this business longer than 99% of everyone. He will be the first to tell you he learns something new every day.

Or Paul Hawkinson himself, a *genuine* guru with over 40 years (nobody has that kind of tenure!) at this. First, he will tell you he is *not* a “guru;” then he will ask you “Give me something to think about, there is always something new and exciting coming around the next corner.” **TFL**

Neil McNulty is president of McNulty Management Group

(www.mcultymanagement.com), a firm which teaches placement firms how to start up military placement desks by using its proprietary “30/30 Placement Program™” for placing military personnel by geographic preferences. If interested in learning how to start up the “only recession proof desk specialty,” call him at 757-460-0510, or email him at neil@mcultymanagement.com for details.

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