

Do Clients and Candidates All Lie?

When I first joined the recruiting business in 1995, there was a veteran recruiter in the office who shared with me his secret for recruiting success. Scooby, when it comes to candidates and clients, remember this: T. A. L. I asked him what T. A. L. stood for and he said, They all lie. The candidates lie. The clients lie. They ALL lie and they're all a bunch of filthy liars. Welcome to the business, rookie.

At that point I questioned whether or not I should have joined an industry that seemed to enter business relationships with trepidation about the truth. But I learned that when it comes to this business of recruiting, the candidates and clients probably aren't intentionally lying to us to make our lives miserable. It's more like they're playing poker with us and we have to know how to read them so we can take them to the next step which ultimately benefits them. And if you approach it this way, then learning about human behavior and trying to figure out what is really going on beyond the surface level of facts becomes both intriguing and interesting. And when you get good at it, it gets fun.

Don't think of people as lying because then you'll turn into a washed-up and cranky low-billing cynic and you'll lose all your friends. Instead, learn how to read the tells of candidates and clients to help you learn when they are bluffing and what type of hand they hold. They don't lie. They're just playing poker with you.

Here are eight considerations in determining whether or not you can get to the real truth with a candidate or client:

- 1)** Listen to how quickly they respond to your questions. If you ask them a question and it's something they should know the answer to very quickly but they hesitate, then you've got to consider that this response could be true, but it also might be a slight variation, exaggeration, or embellishment.
- 2)** Ask them the same questions several times throughout the process. I usually ask a candidate what their salary is at least twice throughout the process. I want to make sure that the number doesn't change in a matter of days.
- 3)** Listen to how they get nervous over the phone. You can pick up on this when they start their sentences with subtle coughs or clear their throat several times in their sentence. Ask them a question about something, and if you get throat clearing, then you're going to get a peculiar answer from a nervous person.
- 4)** Observe how quickly they return your calls. If all of a sudden that great candidate who seemed excited early on in the process stops returning your calls, then his or her interest might have waned and they don't want to hurt your feelings by telling you they are not interested.
- 5)** Always give people the benefit of the doubt. Once I was engaging a candidate in a conversation, my first conversation with him, and all of a sudden the line goes dead. Why that lie. . . I thought to myself. How dare he hang up on me! So I got a grip, took a deep breath, called him back and said that something must have happened to the line and we must have got disconnected. He profusely apologized and said he accidentally hung up on me when he was trying to press his do not disturb button on his phone because he was very interested in hearing about my opportunity. That's why you always call people back when they hang up on you. Just act like nothing happened but a technical difficulty. If it was an accident, then it's no big deal. If they did hang up on you, then they'll be too embarrassed to do it again and you'll find that these calls go extremely well because they realize that you have a high enough sense of self-worth not to let people push you around like that, so they'll end up respecting you more in the end. But don't tell them that you think they hung up on you.

Give them the benefit of the doubt and allow them to save face. Always give people an out. If you do this, you'll draw them toward you, not push them away.

6) With candidates, let them know that if they are not interested at any point in the process to tell you that. When you say something like this, then they are drawn toward you and can trust you and can share their concerns with you: At any point in the process if you aren't interested in my client's opportunity, just tell me that because if it's not in your best interests, then I'm not interested either. (But also realize that if you honestly believe that your client's opportunity is in their best interests then it's your duty to try to talk them into considering it. If you believe it then you have a responsibility to help that candidate understand that.)

7) Observe their actions, not their words. There is a candidate who I used to call each week just to see how many times he will tell me he is going to send me his resume without sending it. We went as far as week seven. I knew that wasn't going to send it. I just wanted to see how long it is humanly possible to keep getting an unfulfilled promise about getting a resume. There was another candidate who I helped to relocate to Charlotte and worked with me exclusively to help him in his transition. He's a sharp fellow and fits the criteria of a low-risk candidate and sends me emails saying how excited he was about working with me and that the more he thought about it, the more enthusiastic he was about making this move. This is someone that is going to get both my time and my attention. When you look at where you should spend your efforts, spend it on those who are physically participating in the process (sending you emails, returning your calls, sending you resumes) and not those with empty words.

8) Realize that there are variables going on in the life of the candidate that you don't know about and things that they probably don't or won't tell you. Maybe they are going through some intense family challenges right now. Perhaps there is a personal crisis in their life that is factoring into the equation. I had a candidate open up to me a few years back about how he thought my client would negatively perceive his sexual orientation. That was the final concern keeping him from moving forward. I told him that it was none of my client's business and that they were hiring him because he was a superstar. He made the move and it worked out for him. You never know what's going on in the mind of someone else, but if you convey that you are on their side as well as your client's side, that you want to create a mutual satisfaction of needs, then you get them to share with you some of those things that might otherwise take them out of the picture. I think that's why most people enjoy this business, because of the tight relationships that can result when a placement works out.

When you learn how to read people and notice these tells, then there's no telling how successful you'll become when you master this poker game of recruiting.

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