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Want to access the hidden job market and find a job faster?

Working with a recruiter may be just the ticket.

But how do you locate one? What should you look for? And what should you expect?

To find out, I interviewed two experienced recruiters: Rick Fox, Branch Manager at the Minneapolis office of MRI (www.mrimpls.com) and Pat Riley, principal of Houston-based, 10 Abbott Street, a national search firm (www.10abbottstreet.com).

Where do you start looking for a recruiter?

An excellent way to locate a recruiter is the same way you'd look for a barber or dentist -- ask around, according to Pat Riley. "I suggest using the 'friend network' first by asking friends and family if they know any good recruiters," he says.

Other avenues include the Yellow Pages (look under Employment Agencies) and the Internet (visit www.google.com and search for "recruiter" plus any industry or geographic terms that apply to you; example: "recruiter retail Chicago").

"Look for a recruiter who specializes in the industry you're in and want to stay in. Recruiters really can't help those who want to change industries or careers -- this is a common misconception," advises Rick Fox.

What are the benefits of working with a recruiter?

A good recruiter can introduce you to good jobs before they're ever advertised.

"If an opportunity is available in your industry, you may get a call from a recruiter with information that very few people are going to know about," says Fox.

A recruiter may offer tips on interviewing, too. "The headhunter will probably know at least a couple of questions the hiring manager is going to ask you. They should never put words in your mouth, but they can at least tell you what to expect," says Riley.

How much, if any, should you pay a recruiter?

"Not one red cent," says Riley. "The hiring company should pay the recruiter to fill the position. This is known as a contingency search, and it forces the recruiter

to find the right person more quickly and work harder for you."

Fox concurs. "If you're a candidate going to a search firm, you should never pay a fee."

Is it OK to work with more than one recruiter?

In a word, yes. "I view recruiters as strong horses that you hitch to your wagon -- you want to have as many pulling as you can," says Riley.

Every recruiter understands that you want a job and that you'll work with whoever can help, so don't worry about hurting their feelings.

BUT ... if a recruiter takes you to market and starts shopping your resume around heavily to companies, it's wise to stay loyal. "They may feel cheated if you use someone else," according to Fox.

How can job seekers get the most from working with a recruiter?

It may help to call and offer to sit down face-to-face with a recruiter. "Only 5-10% of job seekers do this. I respect the initiative of those who come and see me, and I tend to work a bit harder for them," says Riley.

You can research your way to better results, too. "If you call up and say, 'I've prepared a list of 15 companies I should be working for -- companies that need me -- and here's why,' that recruiter will be all over you, because you've just made their job really easy," says Fox. You can do corporate research and find target companies at both www.hoovers.com and www.referenceusa.com.

So there you have it -- tips from the trenches on how you can find and work effectively with a recruiter. There's one for almost every career and level of experience, so why not hook up with one this week? Like a dentist or an auto mechanic, you may find it best to have a relationship in place with a recruiter before you need their help. **P.S. -- How's your job search going?**

Unless you're getting all the calls from employers you can handle and are interviewing this week for your dream job, you'll be cheating yourself out of thousands of dollars in lost salary if you don't check out the following 3 tools ...

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