

Optimum Pace in Dating, Gambling, and Recruiting: Lessons from Dan Kutis and Kenny Rogers

2008-09-17

Any American over the age of 30 will immediately recognize Kenny Rogers' 1978 hit The Gambler:

'You got to know when to hold'em, know when to fold'em,

Know when to walk away and know when to run.

You never count your money when you're sittin' at the table.

There'll be time enough for countin' when the dealin's done.'

The song's metaphor teaches that the key to winning and losing in life is the ability to control situations, distinguish between the times when one should be quick or slow, and know when it is best to stand one's ground or retreat. The craft of the old gambler is strikingly similar to the art of a successful recruiter. Just like the gambler, recruiters make a 'life out of readin' peoples' faces.' During our intensive efforts to judge the abilities and skills of a candidate, however, we can sometimes forget that pace-i.e., knowing when to walk and when to run-is an extremely important aspect of the job. Without it, hiring managers can make incorrect decisions or be rejected by top candidates.

Know When to Walk

A typical recruiting process should be no less than two weeks, but it can be slightly shorter or significantly longer. Two weeks, however, is a safe period of time that will usually allow issues with present employers (such as a suspected termination) to surface before the offer is made. Although interviews and reference examination require methodology and strategy, informed intuition must determine the pace of each process. We need the right amount of time to examine whether the candidate has the right values, work ethic, and skill sets for our company, candidates will also need two weeks or more to get a clear picture of what we have to offer.

Good people do move fast if they are actively looking for a change. They are also the most difficult to recruit and the most likely to turn you down if you cannot establish your value. Candidates with good jobs may make hiring managers feel more confident about their abilities, but they will need more time and information than unemployed applicants. They will need multiple impressions of the company and its co-workers, as well as time to digest all information between meetings. When interviewers sound urgent or do not allow candidates time to reflect, they lose control of the situation and their opportunity to build the full story of a candidate's future happiness.

Know When to Run

A key factor in determining optimum pace is knowing whether the applicant is actively pursuing other opportunities or offers. Unless I am dealing with someone whom I have recruited, I tactfully feel out whether they have been to other interviews by asking the following questions: Why did you approach me? Are we the first company that you approached? How did you feel about this interview compared to others that you have been on? In any game, it is essential to understand the playing field as much as possible. If a top applicant has an offer deadline with another company, I need to know so that I can move quickly and make my offer before that deadline.

Know When to Hold'Em

Anyone with a fair amount of dating success knows that you have to look for certain signs before making your move: eye contact is a necessary prerequisite to a first kiss. We also need to look for readiness signs in the recruiting process. The Hamister Group, Inc. recently had a great candidate for a management position. Since I recruited him and was aware that he was not actively seeking a change (in fact, he said that he would never have considered a move if I had not contacted him first), I knew that I had to proceed slowly. Two of my colleagues interviewed him. They were very optimistic and wanted to extend an offer after their meetings. I felt that the applicant was not ready and might refuse if the offer was made too soon, I therefore asked my colleagues to wait. Over the weekend the candidate left me a voicemail saying that, after having had some time to think, he was very enthusiastic about the position and looked forward to speaking with me again. That was the sign. I made the offer the following week and he accepted.

Always remember this: solid candidates with good jobs get spooked if you move too fast. This is common sense in dating: we don't ask people to marry us on the first date. It should also be common sense in recruiting. Now that's an ace that you can keep.

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This article comes from Hotel News Resource

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