

The Ten Percent group of Websites

www.lawyer-recruitment.co.uk

Advice for Law Firms employing Solicitors and Legal Staff

Why use recruitment consultants?

Why use the Ten-Percent group?

A guide to the process of recruitment through recruitment consultants

A simple guide to retaining staff

Why use recruitment consultants?

It is a simple reality that in a similar vein to estate agents and selling houses it is easier to use recruitment consultants to fill a position than to advertise it yourself. With the cost of a page advertisement in the Law Society Gazette costing over £5,000 for one week's advertising, fees for recruitment consultants that are due only when a candidate is placed suddenly make more sense.

Recruitment consultants can also help in a number of ways. Throughout the process you have an independent voice for the candidate to speak to, and this is invaluable for you. Often firms do not realise how much negotiation and discussion has taken place even prior to sending out a CV. Candidates like to be guided towards particular firms, and given advice on whether a firm is suitable for them.

Ten-Percent Legal Recruitment consultants aim to be impartial to both clients and candidates, giving straightforward advice during the recruitment process and assisting with any negotiation required. We take the strain away from you dealing with applications as you will receive CVs from us that match your job description.

We are also aware of the market in most areas of the UK. We have had over 2,000 solicitors register with us since we started out in April 2000, and most ask to remain updated of vacancies throughout their careers. Salary ranges are also something we can assist with – often firms are not aware of other offers a candidate may have, and lose the chance to recruit a quality fee earner simply by not offering sufficient money to them in the first instance. By using recruitment consultants you benefit from being aware of the salary required to attract a particular candidate.

Why use the Ten-Percent group?

The Ten-Percent group of websites cover all aspects of law in all areas of the UK and overseas. We have specialist knowledge of particular legal fields, including conveyancing, crime and private client work. The company is headed up by a solicitor, Jonathan Fagan, who has been involved in legal recruitment since 1997, and we understand & recognise your recruitment needs.

Our specialist websites include:

www.jonathanfagan.co.uk (property, litigation and private client)

www.chancerylane.co.uk (London)

www.crime-solicitor.co.uk (crime)

www.homecountieslegal.co.uk (the Home Counties)
www.yorkshire-legal-recruitment.co.uk (Yorkshire)
www.eastmidlandslegal.co.uk (East Midlands)
www.ten-percent.co.uk (the original 'no frills' site)

We have a database of candidates accessible online, and we advertise vacancies across our websites.

Our fees are competitive, and we donate a proportion of our profits to charity each year through our Charitable Trust. In the first 5 years of trading, our charitable work will receive almost £15,000 from the company.

We aim to offer an impartial and straightforward service across the UK. Our terms and conditions vary according to which website the candidate has contacted us through, and are displayed publicly on each website for firms and candidates to read.

A guide to the process of recruitment through Ten-Percent

Receiving our updates

Receiving our updates is the easiest way to keep informed. They are sent out whenever we get new candidates who are likely to be of particular interest to firms. If you do not receive them, simply email us at update@lawyer-recruitment.co.uk

Requesting a CV

If you see CV's on our online database (www.ten-percent.co.uk/canddata.htm) simply note the reference numbers and email them through to us. Alternatively email us through your requirements and we will search the database for you. Emails can be sent to newvacancy@lawyer-recruitment.co.uk

We check with the candidates at all times before sending through CV's, and this can take up to 48 hours in some cases, although most candidates respond within a few hours.

When contacting us it is very useful to have a full picture of the vacancy and a brief outline of the particular department and firm. The candidate may not be suitable, and we can save you the time of looking at CVs that are unlikely to be of interest. If you have a top salary level you want to pay this can be very useful as well.

Further information

We will send through a CV together with any further information that may be of interest to you, including any stated salary levels, start dates, additional detail about caseload etc..

Deciding whether to interview

You decide whether to interview, and let us know. We contact the candidate, ask them to indicate their availability and liase with you to find a convenient time and date. We will let you have the candidate's contact details including a mobile phone number in case of emergency.

Preparation prior to interview

We strongly recommend thinking about what you want to find out from the candidate during interview. A number of firms fail to recruit the right candidate through not being adequately prepared. Try using some of our questions at www.ten-percent.co.uk/interview2.htm as it is very important to ask relevant questions that are going to assess whether the candidate is right for you.

More and more firms are using legal test questions to determine whether a candidate is of good quality. We are not sure whether these do assist, and we suspect that they massage the partner's ego more than decide whether a candidate is good at their job!

Why not try asking procedural questions – ie; which form does a client sign and where is it lodged at court, or what letters need to be sent out to new clients, and what is the required content. This way you will see exactly how proficient the lawyer is at the day-to-day operations, which is what they will be employed for.

Interviewing

Conducting interviews has spawned many books and self-help materials, as it is a heavily analysed procedure. However it is quite a simple operation. You are conducting the interview to determine:

1. Is this candidate going to get on with you?
2. Can the candidate perform the tasks required?
3. Will the candidate be a long term asset (if relevant)
4. Is the candidate going to get on with the clients?
5. What is the candidate worth and how much will it cost to get them.

If you ask the right questions, and adopt a fairly laid back approach to interview, all of these questions should be resolved pretty rapidly.

You do not conduct good interviews by

1. Being rude to the candidate
2. Playing good cop bad cop
3. Cross examining the candidate to try and get them to cry
4. Turning up an hour late
5. Telling the candidate that you cannot afford them, they are useless, but that you will (as an act of kindness) offer them a post at a reduced rate.

All of these will simply serve to antagonise the candidate, reduce their goodwill, and result in a fairly short appointment even if successful as the candidate is probably leaving their current firm to escape from the above!

Do not waffle or drone on about how successful you are, ask the candidate questions. The best way of telling them about your firm is to give them a presentation at the start of the interview, lasting about 5 minutes, highlighting the benefits of them joining you and the job you have available. Spend the remainder finding out about the candidate and discussing the role.

Post-interview

After the interview review the candidate with a colleague. Your secretary will have some input as well. How did the candidate talk to him/her? What was their manner like in reception? Talk to anyone who saw them or knows them in practice to get a good idea of their skills and approach to work. Discuss the interview with a third party and run through the good and bad points. Consider salary levels, benefits to your firm and clients. Speak to the recruitment consultant (ie us) and review feedback that we obtain for you. Provide us with good feedback to confirm the position.

Do not put matters to one side. Recruitment is often a fast moving game, similar to selling houses, and candidates can come and go in less than a week. Candidates also get a bit hesitant about firms who delay making a decision – it gives the impression that the firm is not bothered about them.

Making an offer

Make an offer if interested. Do not conduct a fishing expedition to see how low you can get the salary. It almost always backfires, and candidates will move on rapidly if the money is too low. If you pay well, you retain staff. We see this time and again. Make the offer to the recruitment consultant first, and then whether you speak to the candidate directly to offer them the post is a matter for you. If we know what the offer is, we can discuss it with the candidate. We may also know that the candidate is holding other offers, and we can indicate the salary level we think you may need to offer.

Taking up references

If the candidate accepts the offer, take up references. Do not fail to do this, as there can be hidden issues that do not arise until the candidate has started work with you. We do not take up references initially, but can do this on your behalf if required.

Contracts of employment

If the candidate accepts the offer, draw up a contract of employment and offer letter the same day and send it. Do not delay. We know of firms who have left this for 1 week and lost a candidate as a result. Send a copy through to us as well as the candidate.

Starting day

Agree a starting date, and note down any other issues that need addressing before the candidate joins you. Then address them.

A Simple Guide to Retaining Staff

OK – you have found the perfect candidate for the post you have been advertising for some time. Whether this is via agents, or through direct recruitment it is good you have identified a candidate who fits the bill.

After a month, the candidate leaves. Who is at fault?

Normally firms to whom this happens look at the recruitment consultants and blame them. "Clearly the agency has provided defective lawyers and if that is the quality we can expect than we will not use them again". Firms then blame the candidate – clearly not up to the high quality we expect of our staff, and couldn't cope with it. One phrase that springs to mind is "I always thought there was something up with her, but we thought we would give her a chance".

The one person or entity the firm will not blame is themselves, when in most cases they need to look no further than in the mirror!

Top 10 tips once a candidate starts work:

You found what you thought to be the perfect candidate, and agreed to pay what you thought was a decent salary, but have you done the following:

1. Drawn up and signed a contract of employment
2. Not placed any undue emphasis on the "probationary period"
3. Not reneged on remuneration
4. Ensured that the candidate has adequate support staff, especially if promised.
5. Ensured that the work type fitted the job description.
6. Kept an eye on the candidate to see how they were fitting in.
7. Looked out for any signs of bullying or undue pressure being exerted on the candidate.
8. Gave the candidate the office you promised them at interview.
9. Had at least 2 meetings with the candidate in the first month to ensure that they have no concerns.
10. Encouraged an open door policy to address any concerns.

The top 10 reasons for lawyers changing firms (at any time) are:

1. More money
2. Better prospects
3. Employer is unpleasant
4. Current firm environment not acceptable
5. Time for a change
6. Relocation
7. Returning from leave (maternity or otherwise) and employer not expected to be sympathetic or offer flexibility.
8. Changing part of caseload or work types.
9. Redundancy
10. Leaving the legal profession

Look at your employment practices. Are you considering all of the following:

1. Taking annual reviews seriously?

For a lot of lawyers these days, the only way to get a pay rise is to leave one firm and join another. It simply does not work in most cases anymore to say "we have no money this year, the firm cannot afford to increase pay to any staff including ourselves – you are lucky to have a job in the current climate" when you are driving round in a top of the range Mercedes and your accounts clerk knows exactly how much the firm is generating. It is not a recommended way to develop your firm – keeping staff on low salaries for years on end causes great resentment, reduces enthusiasm to work, and results eventually in staff moving

on to get more money. Take a look in the back of the Gazette each week – you will soon spot trends with some of the firms advertising.

2. Checking the current salary ranges?

I know of firms where they consider £10k per year to be a reasonable wage for a secretary, and £18k a good starting wage for a solicitor. They are not! To buy a house a solicitor needs to be on a salary of at least £25k, and this would only mean they could afford a 1 bedroomed flat on a former council estate in most areas of the country.

If you have not increased your newly qualified solicitor's salary in the past 1.5 years, our own anecdotal evidence is that you need to consider doing so. A lot of solicitors look to move after 1-2 years, as firms consistently fail to appreciate the cost of employing another assistant solicitor at the same level.

3. Ensuring there are sufficient chances for promotion and career advancement?

When was the last time you gave your employees a challenge, took them out for a meal, gave them a few hours off to do an activity together or set a target and rewarded them once this was reached?

If you have solicitors who are 3 years qualified, have you considered promoting them and changing their status on the headed notepaper from Assistant to Associate? Have you considered their value as a partner, whether salaried or equity? Can you recall how you felt when you became a partner, and the status that is attached to this?

If you have newly qualified solicitors have you set them enough challenges without overloading them? Do you speak to them with respect in front of other members of staff and treat them as equal fee earners?

If you have secretaries who would make excellent fee earners, have you offered them funding for any courses they may undertake? Have you discussed their potential with them?

Can staff see that if they perform well their careers progress, as opposed to simply getting no acceptance of their hard work and their careers stagnating because there are no recognised methods of career progression within the firm?

Staff like to be given encouragement in their work. They are not working for you out of loyalty or enjoyment (although we accept some must do with the salaries they receive!). If partners of law firms are not complimenting their employees and telling them what a fine job they are doing, sooner or later they will lose any enthusiasm or drive they had and settle down to the task of "getting by". You tend to notice staff who are "getting by" when they seem to progress very little in any aspect of their caseload or career.

You have to give staff a sense of belonging and show appreciation – even a small step such as taking the opportunity occasionally to stop by their room and ask them about their caseload is one easy and low cost way to demonstrate this. Members of staff who feel that they belong in a practice can stay for many years, simply out of loyalty (although the salary still has to be sufficient).

Remember that you have a purpose for working – the harder you work the more you earn – no-one is going to pay you if you do not invest time and effort into your practice. This is not the case for salaried staff, unless you have incentives, offer encouragement and ensure that career advancement is possible.

4. Made sure your workplace is comfortable, warm, secure and well equipped?

If you have your employees sat in a smelly unventilated hole of an office, with computers dating back to 1995, filing systems that are falling to pieces, no heating, and desks huddled together with no personal space, you may wonder why they take time off for illness, show a reluctance to come into work, leave at the first opportunity, and generally look as though they do not like you.

If you were spending 8 hours of your day sat in these conditions, you would perhaps also wonder why you were there!

It does not cost a lot of money to invest in decent office equipment, a cleaner and ventilation systems. It does cost a lot of money and time to find new staff.

5. Being nice to them.

One of the main reasons solicitors in particular register with us is because they have found their current workplace to be unsatisfactory. In most of these situations it is because they are finding it difficult to get on with a more senior member of staff or there is a colleague at the same level who is on a power trip.

Try the following top 10 tips for being nice to employees:

1. Speak to them as if they are equals (and human beings). They are.
2. Ask them about their personal life – how was your weekend, didn't Chelsea do well, how are the children are all innocuous enough, and don't take much effort.
3. Listen to your staff when they respond to questions. If a telephone call comes in whilst talking to an employee tell your secretary you will ring them back.
4. If an employee makes a mistake, stop and think before speaking to them.
5. When criticising an employee, think about what you are saying, and how bad the mistake really is.
6. Do not throw things at them.
7. Spend time out of work with them – invite your colleagues out for a meal – not just at Christmas. When out on the meal, talk about things other than work.
8. Do not promise and then not deliver.
9. Do not allow bullying under any circumstances by any colleague.
10. Do not shout at junior members of staff – one day they will become senior members of staff.