

## Making an Offshore Recruitment Partnership Work: Five Best Practices to Ensure a Successful Offshore Engagement

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As the offshore recruitment buzz spreads across the staffing industry, you hear of the successful engagements that have paid off handsomely for some staffing firms and the horror stories that have soured the offshore model for others. What makes one offshore partnership wildly successful and another incredibly frustrating? How do you ensure that your partnership is one of the successes?

### The Key to Offshore Partnership Success: Communication

It's not surprising. Most successful relationships—business and personal—come down to one basic principle. You must have strong communication to make it work. The same holds true for successful offshore/onshore partnerships. And I'm not talking about a one-time introductory conference call or kick-off meeting. The interaction has to be ongoing, daily, frequent and proactive. Sounds simple, but the reality is that poor communication is the underlying reason most offshore/onshore relationships fail.

Here are five best practices I've learned through my experiences, all of which touch on communication, for creating a successful offshore recruitment partnership.

**1. Be realistic.** There's a misperception across the industry that staffing firms sign up with an offshore provider and candidate automatically begin to appear. Engaging with an offshore partner is not a "plug and play" proposition. Staffing firms who believe this misperception will fail to successfully incorporate an offshore recruitment model and may not be able to keep up with the competition that does. Be realistic about what an offshore partner can and cannot do. Establish a common understanding about the type of work the offshore provider will be delivering—sourcing, recruiting and sourcing, recruiting only, etc. Gaining a clear understanding of who is doing what is the first step to a successful relationship.

**2. Gain buy-in at the get-go.** Before kicking off an offshore partnership, it's imperative that everyone in the organization—from the receptionist to the CEO—understands the reasons for partnering with an offshore provider and the benefits it will bring them personally and for the company. Skipping this important step sets the partnership up for failure. Uninformed staff members tend to view their offshore counterparts as threats instead of partners who can help them find and place more candidates, achieve better results and ultimately earn more commissions.

**TIP:** Lean on your offshore partner for help drafting e-mails and internal communications that educate internal staff regarding the nature and purpose of the partnership. You may be working with an offshore partner for the first time, but surely this isn't their first time working with an onshore partner. Leverage their experiences for greater communication success.

**3. Set expectations.** Make sure that everyone involved is on the same page as far as expectations for the working relationship—be they hours of operation, company standard operating procedures or recruiting goals. Determine standards for communicating—set a certain time of day for updates or a scheduled phone call to review candidates, prioritize openings, etc. Involve your offshore partner in important companywide meetings; they should make the effort to adjust their schedules in order to participate in these critical gatherings. Make sure everyone is always on the same page and expectations are set early on.

**CASE IN POINT:** One client engaged an offshore recruiter who aligned his schedule to U.S. business hours. This way, the recruiter was able to participate in daily requirement meetings and provide real-time assistance to the U.S. team. Within 90 days, the

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offshore recruiter had earned the client enough profit to cover his annual salary. Based on this initial favorable experience, the client gradually increased the number of offshore full-time recruiters. While realigning schedules continues to work for this particular client, not all partnerships require realigning schedules to this degree. However, successful engagements do require a commitment to work with each other and determine the best modes of communication.

#### **4. Integrate offshore partner into onshore team.**

Make sure your firm's attitude isn't "us vs. them." Offshore partnerships are a team effort between staffing firms and their providers. Always remember that there are talented professionals on the other side of the phone, e-mail or IM. Those team members are just as dedicated to the company's goals and objectives as team members in the U.S.—only they're located across the globe. To fill requirements successfully, honest communication and true team collaboration between the onshore staff and their offshore counterparts needs to be encouraged and fostered.

**CASE IN POINT:** Based on the requirements submitted by its onshore team, an offshore partner submitted eight solid candidates for a position, three of whom were interviewed by the client. While the candidates matched all of the criteria in terms of experience, skills and education, the offshore provider wasn't informed of the one key, determining factor—the candidate had to love to fish. Unfortunately, the onshore team neglected to add that detail to their requisition and subsequently all three candidates were rejected—none enjoyed fishing.

**5. Establish a single point of contact.** Appointing a relationship manager—someone with authority to make decisions and get things done—streamlines communication and ensures that the right information is being submitted to the offshore partner, and vice

versa. That person serves as a liaison and advocate between the offshore partner and staffing firm management, protecting the relationship and making sure that everyone is working as a team.

**CASE IN POINT:** Having the right point of contact is critical for a successful offshore relationship. One firm learned the hard way when they decided to change relationship managers for their offshore provider. The original contact was a high-level manager who understood the value of the relationship. During their tenure, the offshore partnership yielded eight placements in six months. Strong numbers. Unfortunately, when the company switched managers, the new contact wasn't well-versed in offshore partnerships and lacked the communication skills that are imperative to success. Contact became sparse and requirements were often incomplete. The result? Zero placements in the following six months.

#### **A Clear ROI**

Engaging an offshore recruitment firm can be very attractive for U.S. staffing companies. Not only do firms gain increased access to talent, greater speed in identifying candidates, and improved efficiency in recruiting, they also have the potential to realize significant profits. It is not unheard of for staffing firms to achieve gross profit margins on placements made by offshore recruiters to the tune of 85 to 90 percent of the offshore recruiter expense. But just simply signing a contract is not the silver bullet to success. As with any successful relationship, it boils down to strong communication across all aspects of the partnership.

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