

# When the Headhunter Calls

Gordon Kirk – G. Kirk & Associates

## CSEG Geophysics 2002

### Summary

Merger, amalgamation, centres of excellence, multidisciplinary teams, team leader, technical advisor, consultant, startup, foreign subsidiary, head office, domestic, international. So many changing work environments and roles available for geophysicists in today's petroleum E & P companies and service sectors – yet so little time is dedicated to actually managing one's own career development. Do you know your worth in the marketplace? Are your skills current and marketable? What do you do when the headhunter calls?

In this 20 minute presentation, the author provides a list of DO's and DON'T's when dealing with executive search firms (headhunters) as well as some insights into the types of searches and how one can better control the search process. For instance, it is imperative you do *not* provide your resume to a search consultant without some conditions first being met. Do you know some of the key questions to ask before making any decisions about a new job opportunity?

With over 20 years of human resources experience, working for several E & P companies of varying size and now currently the president of his own search firm, the author draws heavily on his personal recruiting experience having worked on "both sides of the table".

### So what do you do when the headhunter calls?

Many geophysicists have had considerable experience dealing with the various search firms in town and may feel they have this subject well in hand. For these people, this presentation may be somewhat of a refresher, although even they will benefit from the practical suggestions of the Do's and Don't's provided in this presentation. Many, however, treat these calls from headhunters as "nuisance calls" to be returned at their leisure or not at all. In today's work environment where companies are continually merging, paring away non-core business assets and downsizing staff, it is critical that geophysicists stay attuned to the changing career opportunities in this industry. Headhunters are one of the best sources of career information and you should freely "pick their knowledge" of the industry on a regular basis.

Do listen politely, even if not currently interested in making a job change at this time. If it's not convenient to discuss right then, agree on a later time when you can take several minutes to hear more details about the opportunity. There will usually be a position profile which more completely describes the opportunity which can be e-mailed confidentially to you. If you really aren't interested in the opportunity, advise the headhunter of this in a timely manner, thank the headhunter for considering you, provide them with a name of any other associates who you feel would be interested (if they get the position, they'll owe you a favor) and end the conversation.

Do find out more about the headhunter and the nature of the search. What stage is the search at right now? Is this a replacement position or a new role due to growth? How did they get your name? Is this search being conducted on a contingency or retainer basis? Contingency searches are generally conducted to fill junior to intermediate positions. The headhunter only gets paid a fee when one of their candidates is actually hired. Several search firms may be working on the same assignment so speed is of the essence to locate potential candidates and get them in front of the client. With retainer searches, a headhunter is retained on an exclusive basis. A portion of the fee is paid up front when the search commences, a further payment is paid when a short list of candidates is presented. The final payment is paid when a candidate is actually hired. Retainer searches are generally conducted for more senior technical or managerial positions. The time taken to fill the position, although still important, is generally secondary to thoroughly researching the market for several strong candidates to provide a choice for the client.

Do keep your resume current and up to date, even if not actively conducting a job search. Keep adding your current accomplishments and refining your resume to reflect your capability today. A headhunter is an excellent resource person who will provide you feedback on the state of your resume.

Do not provide your resume to any headhunter who requests it and do not fall victim to the common belief that the more resumes you have out there the better your job search is going. Besides yourself, your resume is your most valuable asset when marketing your services. Whenever possible and especially for more senior people, your resume should only be provided in person and only once you know for certain there is a viable opportunity for which you would like to be considered. Many people mistakenly provide their resume to any headhunter who asks for it without first determining the nature of the job. Once your resume is entered into the headhunter's database, you have given away one of your key advantages in the search process. It becomes harder to get the headhunter's personal attention once you've delivered them your resume. Just once, try withholding your resume from the headhunter and watch the attention you get, especially from the larger search firms in town.

The list of practical Do's and Don't's as provided in the presentation is more extensive than listed here. It is largely based on industry practice and a thorough understanding of the search process. By understanding the role of and the contribution made by the headhunter, you can maintain better control of the job search process as it unfolds. The professionalism with which you conduct a job search or pursue a job change can work to your advantage in your present role even if you don't end up changing jobs.

Headhunters, when used properly, can not only provide you a window into alternate career opportunities but can also be used to develop and polish your interviewing skills, giving you insights into your strengths and deficiencies in a relatively non-threatening environment prior to meeting the client who is the real decision maker. Too often, when the headhunter calls, people don't pursue these opportunities to their full extent and as a result may miss out on an excellent career management tool.

**References: Not applicable**