



ClearanceJobs®

CLEARANCE MARKET UPDATE

**4 RECRUITING MUST-DOS
(AND 5 ACTIONS TO AVOID)**

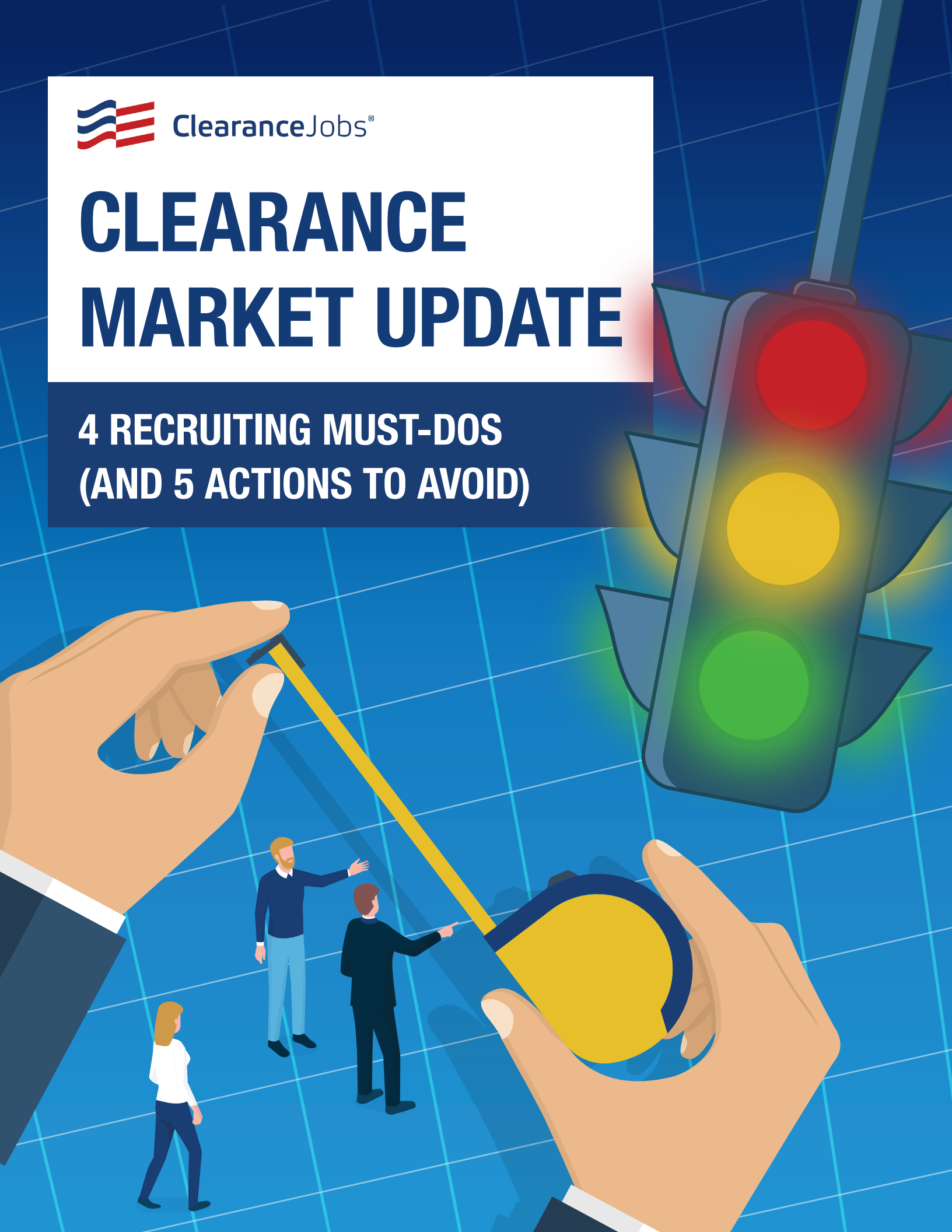


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State of the Security Clearance Process



After years of market turbulence, the security clearance process is seeing quantifiable improvements—security clearance processing times are decreasing, the backlog is within arm’s reach of a steady-state, and continuous evaluation is being implemented to replace the threat gaps created by 5- and 10-year reinvestigation timelines.

Despite improvement, recruiters are still feeling the crunch. The reduction in investigation timelines has created a new backlog—pending adjudications. And the transfer of information between the government and industry—markedly improved under the tenure of the National Background Investigations Bureau—faces another test as NBIB goes away with the transfer of the background investigations mission (back) to the Department of Defense this October.

There are **four pervasive market dynamics** affecting everything cleared recruiting teams do today:

- 1 Fewer cleared professionals than at any time since 9/11
- 2 Lengthy security clearance processing times
- 3 Cleared job openings at an all-time high
- 4 Most cleared professionals already working

“The cleared marketplace remains as competitive as ever. Recruiters must be innovating, and updating their messaging if they want to attract and retain talent.”

Evan Lesser

President and Founder, **ClearanceJobs**

“If you were to look over the last three or four months, you would see that every month the numbers are dropping. The business process improvements that NBIB—now DCSA—is making are having a dramatic impact, and they’re on track to get the security clearance backlog to a steady state well before the end of the calendar year of 2019.”

Charlie Sowell

Chief Operating Officer,
iWorks Corporation

Let's Take a Closer Look at the Market



The Shrunk Security Clearance Population

The reduction in cleared workers has been a detriment to national security. Even acting DCSA Director Charles Phalen has stated the focus should not be on the number of individuals who hold clearances, but making sure national security workers have the right eligibility for the jobs they need to do. The good news? The cleared population can't get a lot lower. Unless we face another Edward Snowden-level security breach, reductions won't be the issue. But trying to attract and retain cleared workers from a population at its lowest level since 9/11 is still one of the biggest challenges cleared recruiters face.

"The guidance is still to only give clearances to those who need it," said Sowell. "The ODNI memo that came out basically instructed agencies to get rid of clearance for folks who were eligible but who weren't in access. Theoretically, that makes a lot of sense, but it kills the bench used for proposal development, and doesn't allow for a bench of talent who can go to work tomorrow if we win this particular job."

Lengthy Security Clearance Processing Times

Security clearance processing times are just beginning to see improvement from the

highest levels we saw in 2018—but it's still taking an average of 468 days to process a Top Secret clearance and 234 days to process a Secret clearance, for the fastest 90% of Department of Defense/industry applicants.

Closed 564,001 cases
between October 1, 2017 – Aug. 31, 2019¹



"Folks who are waiting hundreds of days for a clearance are entering the cleared marketplace with a bad taste in their mouth," said Lesser. "They're seeing firsthand some of the frustrations that need to be addressed in clearance reform. I'm positive reforms will happen over time, but not immediately."

The good news? Process improvements being implemented today, including using VTC solutions for investigation interviews and hubbing to help move through a number of investigations in a shorter period—are starting to make a difference.

Sowell notes that's just the beginning of initiatives designed to both improve the process and create information sharing.

"For example, today, DCSA is using robotic process automation, and they're replacing the mundane tasks that a human has to do repetitively—like opening 100 PDFs per investigation—and replacing that with automation," said Sowell. "It frees up the workforce to be able to focus on more important things...things like quality. That's where you want your human workforce focused—on quality and investigative actions, not just opening PDFs."

For cleared companies, Sowell's iWorks Corporation is also working with DCSA to provide dynamic dashboards with information on company status. Through a GovCloud solution, companies would be able to log on and view their company's data—and only their company's data. That information would help them know where employees are at in the security clearance process, and how soon they can put them to work on critical government programs. That's good for hiring, and good for national security.

Cleared Job Openings at an All-Time High

While the candidate supply is at an all-time low, the total number of cleared jobs is at an all-time high. It's basic supply and demand: There aren't enough cleared workers to fill the massive number of open positions. Every day we see new government contracts being awarded, and they require cleared personnel. In some cases, those personnel just simply don't exist, or they exist in limited quantities—so limited that sometimes there are literally only a handful of candidates with the right combination of skills and security clearance.



Most Cleared Professionals Already Working

The last key factor that every recruiting team should fully understand is that the vast majority of cleared workers in the current marketplace already have jobs. In fact, not only are most cleared people employed, they're actually fairly happy in their jobs. They're mostly satisfied in their work, and their pay, according to a recent ClearanceJobs candidate survey. They aren't just passive candidates, they're happy candidates. They don't need to look for new opportunities, new opportunities are being presented to them almost every day.

With nearly full employment, particularly for coveted tech candidates, most recruiters are forced to poach from competitors to fill their cleared positions. Unfortunately, with the continued roll out of continuous evaluation—now covering 1.4 million clearance holders—reciprocity woes (transferring clearances between organizations) may only get worse.

"I think reciprocity is probably our biggest challenge that we're going to face as continuous evaluation

and continuous vetting gets rolling,” said Sowell. “The reason for that is each agency and each department will have a standard set of checks that all of the folks who are cleared and enrolled in the continuous evaluation will get—but then each agency will also do their own thing.”

Within agencies, Sowell said he expects things will

be codified and streamlined—but for individuals with clearances who need to transition between agencies like the Department of Defense, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Intelligence Community—there will likely be a significant learning curve. Problems with reciprocity could increase over the coming years—even as the investigation timelines draw down.

This isn’t the cleared marketplace of 2015, 2013, or 2012. Today’s recruiters are living in a new reality, and one that is more challenging than ever.

Recruiting cleared talent today may seem like an insurmountable challenge—but it isn’t. Every day candidates are reporting how they’ve successfully obtained jobs on ClearanceJobs, and employers are successfully making hires. With the right

tactics—and the right tools—sourcing success is at your fingertips.

Successful recruiters are using specific strategies to find, pipeline and hire. And they’re avoiding old school tactics that may have been successful five-or-ten years ago, but that are engagement killers today. Here are five tactics to avoid, and four tips to implement today.

5 Tactics to Avoid:

- 1 Cold Calling Candidates
- 2 Contacting on LinkedIn
- 3 Sending Untargeted Email
- 4 Overreliance on Job Postings
- 5 Skipping Candidate Nurturing

4 Things You Should be Doing:

- 1 Talent Pipelining
- 2 Employ Modern Recruit Marketing
- 3 Conduct Entrance & Exit Interviews
- 4 Pay Attention to Attrition

5 Tactics to Avoid:



1

Cold Calling Candidates

Like dating or courtship, you've got to slowly warm up your candidate prospects. Cold calling a candidate is like asking for their hand in marriage on a first date. It's a bad idea. For security-conscious cleared candidates, they'll assume your cold call opportunity is spam, or even worse—you're a spy from Russia or China.

Candidates are getting hit with so many requests to apply for jobs, any message that sounds like "please return my phone call," is just more noise.

is being used to exploit professionals for foreign government interests. It's time to examine how you connect on LinkedIn and eliminate it as a recruiting communication source. LinkedIn may be a great way to publish your thoughts or connect with old coworkers, but just like cold calling, for security-conscious cleared candidates, contacts on LinkedIn are just asking to be ignored—or reported to a security officer.

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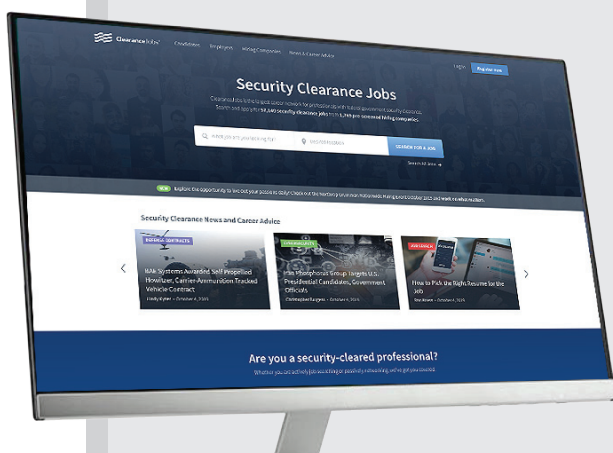
Contacting on LinkedIn

The next tactic to avoid is contacting candidates on LinkedIn. The internet's largest professional network has turned into the premier recruiting tool for foreign intelligence officers. Every day another article is published by a major news agency describing how LinkedIn

3

Sending Untargeted Email

Another must-avoid tactic is sending untargeted email. It's so 2009 to send spam. Candidates hate it, and most email platforms are now smart enough to block unwanted or untargeted email before your candidate prospect can see it coming. So why waste your time? The



Skip the shady call and communicate with candidates over a trusted platform like ClearanceJobs. On ClearanceJobs, you can chat with candidates live, in real time, and they have all of the details on who you are and who you work for. Candidates on ClearanceJobs know employers have already been vetted. And when you call using ClearanceJobs Voice, they can literally see who's calling them. That's a level of trust you just can't get on a cold call.



Ten hyper targeted emails are far more valuable than 100 untargeted messages.

3 Things to Say to Candidates

(Besides, 'Hey, let me tell you about this great job!')

- 1 Have you attended any interesting events in your city recently? I'd love to learn more about them!**
- 2 Are you working on any new certifications/what certifications are hottest right now?**
- 3 Did you see that article on ClearanceJobs about recruiting Gen Z professionals? Do you agree that workplace flexibility is one of the top perks you're looking for?**

current trend is hyper-targeting, yet 55% of all email sent is known to be unsolicited. Don't use a spaghetti strategy to message candidates. Platforms like ClearanceJobs allow you to focus your message on specific groups or set up lots of criteria to ensure your message is targeted to the right niche audience. Today, it's all about quality over quantity.

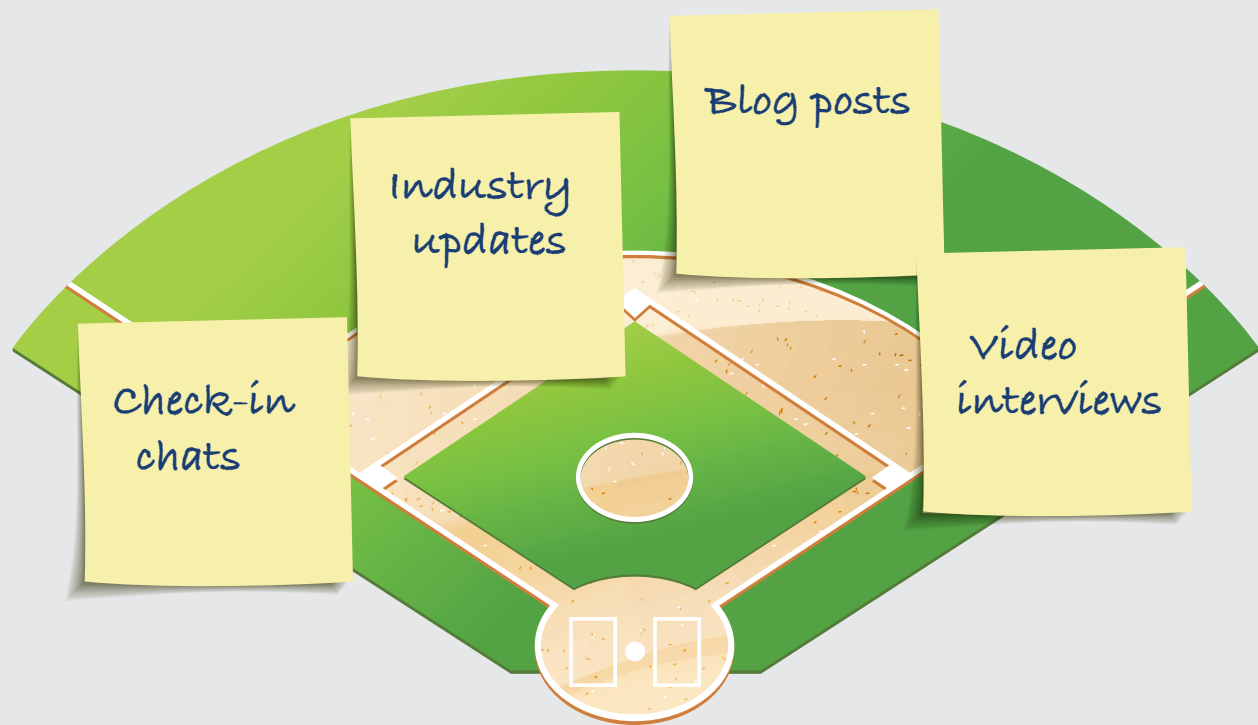


Overreliance on Job Postings

The next thing that we're telling recruiters and recruiting teams to avoid is relying solely or mostly on job postings to make hires. The bulk of your hires will be made by pipelining talent, nurturing candidate prospects into leads, and engaging candidates one-to-one when the time is right. Job postings still have a place in recruiting, but it's not to make hires. Basic job postings today are more about branding, spreading your hiring messages, and gaining exposure. A well-written, engaging job posting can help keep your company's name at the top of a candidate's mind. But it's not likely the first and is absolutely far from the only thing they are seeing before they consider a job.

With 80% of cleared professionals employed, passive candidates are uninterested in giant, 10-paragraph long job postings. An overreliance on





What Makes a Sticky Message?

How can you make a message memorable? What sticks out are helpful messages and resources. If you provide information and useful data to cleared professionals they will remember you, your company, and how helpful you were. Go for the soft sell. For passive, already employed candidates, be a resource today, and they'll be more likely to consider your job tomorrow.

them will mean failure for your recruiting teams. Post your jobs, but don't expect your ideal candidate to apply and present themselves to you on a silver platter. It's just not going to happen in this marketplace.

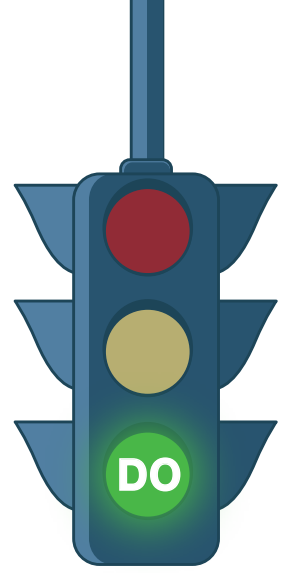


Skipping Candidate Nurturing

The final tactic to avoid is forgetting about candidate nurturing. It's like skipping first base and trying to make a home run without going all the way around. Nurturing candidate prospects

into leads is so important in this tight marketplace. If you fail to nurture candidates and simply attempt to aggressively target (using some of the other tactics we've already mentioned avoiding) you will not be able to attract candidates to your company. Candidates today are bombarded with messages, and you want yours to stick out—in a good way.

4 Things You Should be Doing:



1

Talent Pipelining

First, and probably most important, is talent pipelining. Recruiting firms today are all too often fighting fires day after day and month after month. They never come up for air. At some point, recruiting teams need to take a step back and develop a more proactive approach to recruiting—enter talent pipelining. It's simply a

modified version of a sales funnel, where candidate leads are aggregated at the top, nurtured into prospects, and converted into interviews, applicants or hires.

The smartest talent pipelining efforts aren't just about current and future needs, but anticipating backfills, as well. Everyone wants to retain their talent, but with low overall unemployment and candidate poaching the primary way to fill positions, it's inevitable that you'll lose talent to your competitors—just as you're attempting to lure theirs. If you're properly pipelining, when a critical hire leaves, you'll have at least a few candidates you've already been nurturing. Pipelining changes your team's mindset from reactive to proactive.

Candidate Leads
Aggregate. Organize. Examine.

Candidate Prospects
Nurture. Engage. Prioritize.

Candidate Wins
Interview. Application. Hire.

Why Pipeline Talent?

1. **Move from Reactive to Proactive.** Talent pipelining means moving away from constantly fighting fires to actual strategy.
2. **Reduces Need for Cold Calls.** Pipelining helps transition disinterested candidates into prospects who are already familiar with your organization.
3. **Shortens Time-to-Fill Open Roles.** Pipelining lets you anticipate future backfills, reducing hiring times when it's most crucial.



2

Employ Modern Recruitment Marketing

The world has changed. The cleared marketplace has changed. So why are you still using the same recruiting marketing tactics you were five years ago? If your recruiting strategy is focused on basic job postings, untargeted emails, and firehose candidate targeting, it's time for a recruiting messaging update. There are ways to modernize all of these efforts for a more technically adept audience.

For every recruiting message or activity, consider how you can make it more tailored to your audience. Don't think job search, think career progression and engagement. Update the old school job fair by hosting happy hours, inviting potential candidates to employee events, or hosting more casual open houses. For job postings, create pithy, 30-word descriptions that will attract candidate prospects. Give candidates a small, engaging bite of information and let them come to you for more if they're interested.



Is Your Job Application Process Trapped in the 20th Century?



Today's candidates don't want to sit at a computer, create log-ins for multiple applicant tracking systems, fill out forms almost as long as the SF-86...and then never hear anything. It's the black hole of the job application process, and it's scaring away coveted transitioning veterans and other skilled workers. Ditch the black hole for live chat sessions, text messages and voice-over-IP calls where you can engage directly with candidates in real time.



3

Conduct Entrance and Exit Interviews

Another must-do tactic is to ensure you're conducting thorough entrance and exit interviews with your employees. Most companies are doing exit interviews, but too few are using the information to consider how they can improve, or to truly understand why a candidate chose another position or employer.

Entrance interviews are another chance to gather actionable recruiting intelligence about which messages resonated—and which didn't. Where did the candidate see or respond to your recruiting messages? Which messaging functions were most reliable? Dig deep and learn what the candidate felt about your company over time. If the candidate was considering multiple opportunities, gain business intelligence on your competitor's benefits and compensation. Just like exit interviews, make sure you use entrance interviews to retool your processes based on real, current feedback.

4

Pay Attention to Attrition

Losing a valuable team member costs money, time, and has a huge impact on morale and employee productivity. You should be spending as much money on employee retention as employee recruitment. If you spend five months filling a tough position only to have that person leave, you're back to square one.

A recent ClearanceJobs candidate survey found that 84% of cleared professionals were at least somewhat likely to change employers in the next year. It's not a surprising number, considering the double-digit signing bonuses, aggressive compensation packages, and hyper-competitive recruiting market. Because of the four market trends creating this tight marketplace, cleared

professionals are receiving more job offers than ever—and not just from cleared companies. The same candidate survey found 52% of cleared professionals had received multiple job offers from non-cleared companies.

You know your employees are getting contacted about other job opportunities—make sure you're aware of what may prompt your best employees to leave, and how you can make your company a place they want to stay.

