



# THE PROS AND CONS OF RECOMMENDING A FRIEND

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If you like to listen to horror stories, talk to anyone who has recommended a friend for employment to his/her boss or HR department. You'll hear some spine tinglers! They are perfect examples of the best plans gone awry, along with friendship and reputations.

From garage shop operations to hospitals, organizations are pressing their employees to help them recruit workers. However, before you compile a list of friends who might be potential co-workers, recall your experience arranging blind dates. If they were terrible, forget the list. You are not a matchmaker. If you're good at assessing and matching chemistry, consider the following issues:

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If you submit the name of a friend or former co-worker to HR, you are not providing a money-back guarantee on performance. However, if your hospital is paying a bounty (many are from \$1000 to \$5000) for each lead who becomes a new hire, your recommendation could come back to haunt you. What if your friend stays only six months? Will there be political fallout for you? Will the hospital demand you refund the recruiting bonus?

Even if "recommend" means "give us names of people who are breathing and we'll check them out," you still ought to network internally to find out what others have experienced. They may deny it, but my experience has been that managers punish the messenger when the friend doesn't work out.

### ***How well do you know your friend's work?***

Never mind that he/she is the logical successor to Mother Theresa. That he/she was a star in the department where you both worked 15 years ago is not important. What is that person doing today, and how well? Before you put a name in the hopper, it would help to look at his/her resume. You know what your organization has hired in the past. Are there red flags on your friend's resume that, in the company's desperation to hire more people, might be ignored now but punished later?

For example, we're thinking of people who've had several jobs in the last few years and who, in a recession, would be firmly rejected as job hoppers. Think about protecting your organization from its own worst instincts to hire any referral. You may be told later "You shouldn't have recommended Brenda. She's obviously a

job hopper." This, even though Brenda was assigned to a boss so crazy, an entire psychoanalytic society considered him a one-man test laboratory.

### ***Is your friendship durable?***

We recommended a friend for a job with an association. We told her quite honestly that the executive director had some very strange management theories. She pressed on and was hired. Neither the executive director nor the friend has ever let us forget that we were responsible for that hideous mismatch and both conveniently have forgotten they played any part.

What if the institution takes a bump and your friend is laid off after three months? Will he/she be angry with you? Have we eradicated your good Samaritan instincts or do you still have matchmaking impulses? If you do, the best way to protect all involved, and your career, is to find out if your friends have any interest in changing jobs before you submit their names. Then, get permission and resumes which you can pass on without comment. Do not share ugly insider stories about the organization. It's O.K. to share your own satisfaction with the job and the organization so long as you don't actively sell.

Do not position yourself as knowledgeable about your friend's work, interests, or anything beyond that he/she is respectable and honest. Soliciting resumes is better than giving names because once the resume is passed to the hiring folk, you're free. If asked for further comment, you have none: "Yes, I've known Roger for years, but it's more social than professional. I did give you his resume, didn't I?" Your role is as introducer, not advocate. The worst strategy is to get in the middle of the deal. If things don't go well, that gives both sides a common enemy - you.

The safest route is this: If you know someone you think would be perfect for your organization, ask him/her to consider submitting an application. You'll provide the contact but he/she must decide if and when. We realize you probably won't get a bonus. Only you can decide if the bonus is worth the risk.

If you have an exit strategy and will be gone in six months, the temptation to off-load some attractive time bombs may be great. Wait, you still have a reference to protect. Even if the bombs never turn up, your boss's views of you might be altered by horror stories in the grapevine.

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