

The following complimentary item is from a book I wrote called "Recruiters on Recruiting." Knowing many people in the business with interesting experiences, I wanted to learn about their career paths and have them explain what they do, tips for being a good recruiter, and tips for job seekers. This book was written in 2007 and there have been a few job changes since then! You can check LinkedIn profiles for updates.

Many people (even some in HR) do not understand what services various kinds of recruiters provide, how they work and their benefit to companies.

If you're a job seeker, it's important to know how recruiters work. They don't accept every resume and place people –a common misconception.

Information about the book and another sample can be found at on my [website](#). If you're interested in purchasing the book, I always carry copies in the car! You can also purchase a paperback or e-book on [Amazon](#) or [CreateSpace](#).

I hope you enjoy this piece.

Regards,

Marcia

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CONVERSATIONS ABOUT
LIFE, LOVE AND WORK™



WILLIAM URANGA
SENIOR DIRECTOR OF STAFFING

MARCIA STEIN, PHR

INTRODUCTION

William Uranga has worked in retained search, as a contract recruiter, and is currently the Staffing Director at TiVo. I first met him when he was a speaker at a professional organization talking about the science of recruiting. He was impressive in his depth of knowledge and quantifiable approach to recruiting. This article is a transcribed conversation we conducted in 2007.

My website provides articles and books regarding life, love and work. If there is an occupation you'd like to read about or a person you feel would be of interest to others, please contact me via my website. I'm just a click away.

Thank you for reading!

Marcia Stein

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William Uranga

William: I am the staffing director at TiVo in Alviso, California. I started recruiting about 15 years ago and it was something that I fell into. I didn't plan what I was going to do after college. I had a degree in political science since it was what I had always wanted to study, but beyond that I had not really planned how I was going to apply the degree. I didn't want to go into politics, or be a lawyer, and I didn't want to work in local government. I had an opportunity to do a couple of jobs – some of them involved nonprofit – and it was in one of the nonprofit organizations that I began recruiting summer interns. I learned a lot working in nonprofit. It was easy to recruit interns and the next thing I got to do was recruit volunteers for that same nonprofit. The challenge was that people were more willing to write a check and give it to the nonprofit than to donate their time, which was a much tougher sell. I was curious as to why it was like that and what could be done. That's how I got into recruiting and it broadened into general employment from there. I went from nonprofit into agency search, then I went in-house and came back into an agency.

Marcia: What's the difference between an in-house role and being an agency recruiter?

William: Historically there has been a big mindset difference. Retained search is one way of doing a search and another model is based on contingency. The contingency model tends to have much more of a transactional mindset, where the searchers are much more of a commodity item and you close [a candidate] when you can. I'm sure that would vary from agency to agency. There would be some recruiters who would take umbrage with that – they're very proud of their work. But certainly with the retained search – which is where my background is and I know much better than the contingency side – retained search is much more of a heavy investment in funds up front to be looking for a particular candidate and therefore the client's much more involved in the search process and expects much more information and client services, as do the candidates

in that process. That seems to mirror a bit more closely what corporations want, as far as being an in-house recruiter, although I'm sure that varies too, because some companies are quite transactional. They have a lot of turnover and it becomes agency-like as far as getting the next set of bodies in.

I also think it depends on the company and the mandates of the executive team. If you're in-house the whole idea is to mirror the business practices of what the company's trying to do and make sure the staffing practices support that accurately. Here at TiVo we use all kinds of agencies – those that provide temporary help, those that provide permanent placement on a contingency model, as well as retained search. We tend to be a little more agnostic as far as the sort of firms that we use, as long as they are willing to work with us in our process.

Marcia: You've mentioned a lot of different forms of recruiting. How did you learn your skills?

William: I probably know the least about firms that operate in temporary and contingency since I do not have experience working inside them. I've worked with them across the table and to those that say that would color my view, I agree; it certainly would. I tend to be very driven, very analytical and I want to understand things and be able to shape things. The more I know, the more I'm able to communicate my client or my company's story and that tends to open up doors for other conversation as well.

I got into retained search almost by accident. I met somebody that was part of the BridgeGate group at a Starbucks and we did small talk and went from there. I didn't know beans from buckshot in that situation, but I did know I had to be doing a certain number of calls in order to get a certain number of responses. I focused on human resources at an executive level and some specialization. When you focus on a particular skill set, you start learning all the ins and outs. I focused within high technology, so the skill set was very specific, the market was very specific, so I got to know my sandbox very well. I got to see people's backgrounds as a result of resumes.

Some came from agencies, some from consulting firms, and it was interesting to see what our firm's clients wanted: what would fit with their culture and skill sets and what they were trying to solve, and start correlating the two and be able to explain why our client was looking for this and why you as a candidate didn't fit or why you should consider it. At the same time in talking to the clients, I had to be well versed in this particular aspect of technology, so I was learning about software, middleware, tools, peripherals, chips, and biotech and what have you.

In order to do justice to your client, you've got to know their background, why they're a viable company, why this would be a good place to work and what you're going to learn from them. That means learning their elevator pitch and communicating in business terms, because often the company looking for candidates doesn't want to talk "HR-ese." They just had business problems, so we had to translate that into what experience an HR executive was going to need and provide an ideal candidate. I think that's usually the biggest challenge in HR, being the translator regarding business needs.

I had broad exposure and when I got in-house, I got to be a contract recruiter onsite with the company. I started to know people who were peers from agencies, contingency and what-have-you. I got to see some great experiences, some probably not so great, but I learned what business models work and who has their act together. Then, as a candidate myself, I got pretty savvy with what I was looking for in my next client. It's only really been in the last couple years that I have moved beyond being an individual contributor. There were some times in which I was frustrated and I wanted to move beyond just filling orders. But some of that was just being patient, knowing the right time or the right opportunity and being content and serving client groups or my boss's objectives and making sure they were being successful. I believed then and I certainly believe now that has its own rewards.

Marcia: How did you know it was the right time to move ahead and what kind of position did you obtain?

William: Well, probably the easiest decisions were when some of the decisions were made for me. I was laid off twice at two different companies for business reasons in which they were reducing their staffing or recruiting group down to one or two versus a half dozen, or it was a complete nuclearization of the whole department. If you knew the business model and the industry, you understood and knew it wasn't personal. I'm sure there are others who have had more unpleasant experiences and it was personal or political. Even if mine was, I'd choose not to believe that. At other times I was just assessing what I knew I needed to grow in next. After a while of being part of a search firm, I knew I wanted to see how the other side of the HR world operated. I didn't know if I'd necessarily like it or want to stay in it, but at least I'd be stronger in recruiting for knowing both sides and what the other side's concerns were and would do a better job in communication between the two.

I set out to learn and for some of these organizations it was being part of a team, learning how to work with others that had different strengths and specializations. For others maybe it was a start-up in which I was the jack of all trades, master of none, and I had to figure out how I was going to get it all done and put some processes in place to manage people.

Depending on what you'd like to do next, you should have some sort of game plan of A) know yourself and what environment, industry and profession you want to be in, and B) learning the next steps that will help get you there. I think probably one danger is to be in too much of a hurry to get a VP title. If that happens you may have the title, but you don't have the experiences to back that up. I've seen that in candidates across the board and I think the dot-com era exhibited some of that. I'd rather be a little slow in my career growth than topping out purely from the title standpoint and not having enough to round it out.

I don't think I've done anywhere near the amount of learning I still need to do. The biggest challenge of being internal with a company is you get so knee-deep in weeds that you forget to

look up and do networking or self-education and learn from others. I try to make sure I do that not just for myself, but also bring my present team along, so they're better at communicating the company objectives and learning what's going on in recruiting and tools. If I'm not feeding myself in that sense, there's no way I'll have anything to give to anybody else. And part of that also leads to knowing when I need to move on.

Knowledge is a big key to a lot of different things. Let me start with simple stuff as far as language. I am very curious about how words and phrases get used and that translates into my writing and rewriting e-mails and other things. The better that I, or a member of my team, or a person can communicate their ideas, the farther we'll go, simply because people want to understand and respect a person or support them. I'm constantly reading.

From an industry standpoint, the latest technology is using a reader – an RSS [a way to publish or receive updated content such as blog entries, news headlines or podcasts]. The proliferation of blogs and news outlets is far too much for me to spend my day clicking from one website to another. I've leveraged one particular reader to have a lot of different feeds from logs and websites, so based on the titles that give me a good idea of what they're going to cover, and the ones that are of interest to me, I will read and/or pass along or share – either from an informational resource or an action item or tool – both for myself or for my team. That's one thing I do and you hear a lot as a result – conferences, training and what-have-you – and sometimes I am interested in going to those or encouraging my team members to go to. So that's just from the educational standpoint. I take classes as well.

Marcia: And you teach classes.

William: I do teach, so I give and I take in that sense. I teach at an extension of a local university.

The classes I take aren't necessarily HR-related. I took a recent class on project management. It gave me a different way of looking at things, because when people get raised in one particular discipline, sometimes the rest of the disciplines suffer from atrophy. I'm interested in how project managers – marketing or engineering – look at things. As a result, in recruiting specifically, you will have a start, you will have a process, you will have time, you will have resources and you will have a certain fixed dollar amount and it is a higher match made between the opportunity and an individual that's ready to take it on. I think it's very interesting to challenge whatever my assumptions were of how to do staffing in "an HR way."

I'm one of three people who report to our SVP and try to talk about common problems. If there's a problem in compensation, it is going to affect how I recruit and vice versa. We try to figure out if we need to do more training, if we need to do a better job in communicating via our intranet. Industry conferences have a huge role. The HR Symposium [in the Silicon Valley] is an excellent one to attend to see top thinkers. For recruiting, the Kennedy Center information and the ERE [a recruiting website at www.ere.net] tend to have very good thought leaders from a recruiting standpoint. Learn from them, take a shopping cart method: take what you can use, leave the rest for another time and as a result you will start rubbing shoulders with people. Sometimes there aren't things like that so it's good to teach what you do know. I think as a result [of teaching] I start to organize my thinking a little bit differently, and it's good to hear people specifically respond to what you're teaching.

One other thing that I would add is the importance of understanding the business. I try to go to conferences to learn what my marketing people are hearing and seeing. One thing most internal crews don't do well is understand competitive intelligence. What else are your competitors – whether it's in temp or talent – or the particular market segment are doing. You can read and certainly learn from other people, but as you interview, as you go to industry conferences, you hear what's going on and you can understand why sales is having a particularly tough year and

what you can do about that. How does your current objective map to what you're hearing elsewhere in the market place?

The challenge in my situation of managing a team is that I am not focusing just on recruiting HR people, but I'm focusing on all kinds of skill sets and so for me it's a little tougher to know what's going on in marketing versus customer service versus engineering versus IT. That's where I'm trying to create "Mini-Mes" in the sense of recruiters, to be able to know what is going on and become industry experts.

Marcia: What do you hope to inculcate in the "Mini-Mes"?

William: I would say, one, a passion for the craft from a recruiting standpoint, and that means not just being good at recruiting but being well-rounded. Two, a person should have a thirst for understanding what is going on in the business. Even though they're contractors, they should know what's going on and why does my CEO think this way? How do I therefore translate that in culture and how do I determine whether this candidate is a fit for this culture? It's good to make sure that they're aligned with the hiring manager, but if it doesn't ultimately align with the CEO, you've just added more fuel to a bad fire instead of moving everybody in the same direction. The third thing is they should know what they've done and should be able to articulate what they've done. We have quarterly reviews when employees present a couple of slides of what they've done. I want them to know and not rely on the resume to carry them through. The fourth thing is that whenever it is an appropriate time for them to move on, they will have left a particular department or function in better shape than when they first got here. That's my mantra of giving back or beyond just filling the roles, and I'd say that they've had some fun doing it. It varies from culture to culture, but this is certainly one of those cultures that seek a more balanced lifestyle than grinding your contractor or employee into the ground for whatever short time you can get away with that.

Marcia: I do want to ask you about layoffs, because every recruiter who's been in the Valley for a while knows that there are those times. There are times like the depression that we went through recently where very few recruiters were working. You were working. How did you plan for that? What sustained you during that time?

William: Actually, I don't know that I planned well for it. In the dot-com bust I had a heads-up that it was coming. I mean, there was a major slow-down and 9/11 made it a no-brainer for everybody in many different industries. But I was able to stay with this company. In fact, I was the only staffing person that stayed on and the only reason I was able to do that was they realized they were able to use me in some HR roles. So there's one thing to be said: It's important not to be a one-trick pony in just staffing. It's good to develop other skill sets that are recognized and valued. I ultimately did get caught up in the fourth round of layoffs and it was what it was. I don't know that I had a plan B in that sense. Actually, I don't know many people that could.

I realize that a lot of people moved out of the area or went in totally different industries and are thinking about getting back into staffing – maybe only because there are not enough people to go around and find talent. But what I did to sustain myself during that time – which is part of your question – was I had to find some sort of contentment with what I did get. I did a little bit of retained search, I worked at a start-up, and I went and worked retail some of the time – something totally outside of recruiting. I had fun working some retail. It happened to be in an area of which I have a hobby and passion about. It was a nice switch but after a while it did get a little old. There's a different mindset and I found that they were certainly getting a lot out of me as far as the type of worker I am, while I was getting a lot of discounts. But beyond that, there wasn't anything that could really sustain me. I was really interested in being able to move back into a more full time position – not just in recruiting, but with one organization, and it happened over probably about a year.

I did have those days in which I had enough and thought I should move out of state, so I certainly don't want to make it sound like I had it all figured out. I had my moments of doubt but I stuck with it for a variety of reasons. Ultimately I had decided that if things were going to bounce back, it was likely to happen here much quicker than many of the other places I was considering in the U.S. and that turned out to be true. But there's no easy answer. I guess what keeps you sustained is that you're committed to that craft and you'll do almost anything within reason and legal means to stay in it.

Marcia: Do you have some advice for a new recruiter or someone thinking about going into the field?

William: The first thing I would say is get to know yourself as much as possible. Know what you're committed to – philosophically, what your interests are – and then really learn to be a student in that. It's one thing to get a paycheck for what we do, and I'll be the first to admit that's why I started working retail but it wasn't ultimately my goal. That's fine if it's a short term, but to be only doing it for the paycheck, or because it's what everybody said I was good at and should do, to me is only half the answer and I think that won't bear out in the long term.

Find out what you're really interested in, what sort of an environment you will work well in – maybe it is a contingency agency, maybe it is internal to a consulting firm or at a corporation, and then find out what industry makes sense for you. Maybe it is biotech, maybe service and hospitality, maybe manufacturing. They're all very different, they all have their moments of crisis as far as industry and the companies. Then within that learn your craft, be a sponge as much as possible, and learn – be educated, build your network, read and find people that are willing to invest their time in you so that you're better in your industry and craft.

Then I would say certainly turn around and start giving that back. The reason why you'll be able to give back is because you have been able to take on more than what you were originally

assigned. I don't mean just more reqs. or physically to take on more things, but to be able to understand business – to understand why finance works the way it does, why the locale is the way it is – what idiosyncrasies in culture there are. Become expert in those areas so that you're able to help solve problems beyond just your aspect of the business and people will have a great appreciation because they depend on you. I think that would certainly provide advancement.

It may not be that these people want to advance, which is fine. We have people on this team that have done recruiting for 12 to 15 years and they don't want to get into management. They love what they do, they love the discipline and they love the skill set they recruit for. Give them the reqs client group and they're awesome at it, but don't ask them to manage a program or to manage people. That's not in them and I think it's important for people to know that.

At the same time, I think it's good to keep testing new theories, new ideas and new areas to grow in and not just because you're comfortable with them, but find out things that you're uncomfortable with, things you haven't done before, because as you keep pressing the envelope you find out more about yourself as a result.

Marcia: Every recruiter has stories about good candidates and those who could use improvement. Do you have some advice for candidates in general?

William: Yes, but I probably don't have enough time to go into them all. I'm at a company right now that is something on par with Kleenex in its industry. A lot of people know about it and I continue to be amazed that when people come in they only take that surface knowledge and they don't understand more about the company. They don't understand the executives. I'm not saying they should know VP level people, although we've had some of those, but even frontline individual contributors. I think a lot of people don't know what they're shopping for and as a result they either waste their time, my recruiter's time and the hiring manager's time. That's a big source of a disappointment; people just do not take time to study up about you as a possible

place where they're going to invest a lot of their waking hours and energy. And it's not that they're not interested in the job, they just don't think outside of that. If you're with an agency and you put your candidate in front of your client and they haven't studied, it doesn't look good for them; it certainly doesn't make you look any better as a result.

I would say people are not ready to answer behavioral questions. Sometimes the people doing the interview don't even know how to ask them, so that's a double problem. When candidates are notified that we're looking for somebody to do X, Y and Z, and please give an example of when they've done, X-Y-Z, they often immediately go into theory and it will not earn them brownie points. It depends upon the environment, but here we look for people to wear a couple different hats. It could be that you market programs, but we're looking for somebody that also knows how to do reports and marketing analytics off the reports so they can develop better programs. The ability for somebody to ask questions about what's involved with this role and what they are going to be solving in a role usually doesn't come up. They should ask things like, "What am I supposed to do, who do I work with, what kind of resources?" They don't take it to the next level and ask what they are going to solve for the company and what should be a motivator when they come to any particular organization. I'd say those are a couple of things that people should ask but don't.

Marcia: Is there anything you'd like to add?

William: I think there's a big challenge out there. I was reading an article on Generation Y and the fact that a lot of people have to hop around. We're starting to see resumes that have one year here, one year there, maybe one and a half years elsewhere. The article said that the reason why people have to do this is because they have to pay off school loans and costs are going up. I'm not unsympathetic since I had to pay for the majority of my schooling. The challenge it's presenting for companies is that these people have not learned from their past experiences and it's hard to do that when you've been in a company for one year. You're typically learning the

ropes and making a lot of mistakes the first year. The second year you're typically cleaning up the mistakes and by the third year you start hitting your stride and start to really contribute and be master of certain things. Those people are becoming far more a minority. I'm not sure what the solution is.

I would challenge those people to differentiate themselves far and above everybody else by sticking with their goals for a little bit longer and learn from them, rather than just hopping to the next job because they might have offered a few more coins. At this moment we have an employee or candidate driven market and just remember that we've been here before. During the dot-com days before the bust, people were switching horses all over the place and it is true in this day and age that the individual owns their career path more than any other generation before us. To that end that means you're also responsible for that. If you can take advantage of opportunities, the mistakes you make – you're going to need to somehow justify that down the road to another future employer, as was the case during the bust.

An employer has a choice: somebody that's been at a company for 3, 4, maybe 5 years, and somebody that's been hopping around for 1 year to 18 months. I think people are beginning to be careful about their career in the sense of where they are going next and what would be the things they're going to look for. Most people don't leave companies for monetary reasons. Make sure you know what the rest of the reasons are so when you entertain opportunities you make the smart decision that you'll be able to live with and that you'll be able to explain to future employers.