

The Simple Brilliance of
JOHN LEWIS

The Candidate does the Closing

John Lewis was a recruiter, trainer and manager. Even though he possessed a BSEE, he excelled at everything he tried in the recruitment business—a business that is so oriented toward people with sales experience and/or sales aptitude. John had those sales instincts. And he had a very dry wit—and he was really, really funny. I am using words like “had” and “was” because, like Lou Scott (3/06 & 4/06 *TFL*), John also just passed away.

John and I kind of mirrored each other in our journey through the recruiting industry. John and I both graduated from UCLA. He started in 1980 as an Account Executive with Ron Johnson, MR Fresno. I started in 1980 as an Account Executive with Ed Trapp, MR Reno. We both worked the technical desk. We first met over the phone, shared information and started doing ‘splits’ together. We visited each others’ homes and became friends. I then went into training a few years later and, a few years after that, John followed into the training arena. I then left training to manage an office and a few years later John left training to manage an office. I then returned to training recruiters and John stayed and grew as an office manager.

One of the great advantages of being an on-the-road trainer is that you get a chance to meet top recruiters ‘up close and personal’. And (if you keep your mouth shut and your ears open) you can learn an awful lot about how to maximize your results and do this business correctly. John and I both took the time to learn from the best.

Two of the closing techniques John learned from a couple of superstar recruiters on the West Coast, and passed on to me, were the methods of training the candidates to do their own closing during their ‘face-to-face’ interviews. Here are two of John’s pearls of wisdom that I learned from him years ago and still teach to this day:

Closing at the beginning of the interview

At the beginning of the interview, the candidate enters the interview room and shakes hands with the Hiring Manager (HM). At this point, when the HM is least expecting a close, have the candidate say, “I haven’t interviewed in a long time. What’s going to happen? Can we conclude our business today if everything goes well?” The HM, not expecting an initial closing question, is usually taken off-guard by this question. Because of this, he comes up with a “to the point” answer. Now the candidate continues with the interview. At the end of the interview, the candidate now has the HM’s initial answer against which to close. Since the stage was set correctly on the front-end, closing awkwardness is avoided to each party’s satisfaction.

Closing at the end of the interview

At the end of the interview, the HM will usually ask the candidate if they have any last questions. At this point you have your candidate say, “Well, let’s say that you offer me the position and I accept. What can I do when I start here to relieve your immediate workload?” This close is assumptive (“What can I do when I start here...); it focuses on how the candidate can help the company (“...to relieve your immediate workload...”); and it considers personally helping the HM (...to relieve YOUR immediate...). This close works so well on so many levels. The HM is now thinking, “I haven’t even hired this candidate yet and he is already starting to solve my problems.” It makes an impact.

I remember one candidate I worked with who used this close during his interview. I will call him Dan. After the interview Dan called me and thanked me for giving him this close. He said that during his individual interviews with the top four people in the company, he used the closing question on each person. He said that each stopped to ponder his question before answering. He felt that they knew it was a serious question and were not going to belittle it with a ‘pat’ answer. Instead they thought about it and then told Dan, from their perspectives, what was most important. Dan said that by gleaning the answers from each of the major decision makers in the company, he now knew how to satisfy each. He was made the offer, accepted and has had successful career with this firm.

Another interesting dynamic has occurred with this second close. When debriefing the HMs after the interviews, we have heard sentiments like the following: “After years and years of interviewing, this was the first time that a candidate ever asked me how they could help me and my company. The candidates always ask what I can do for them—how much I’m going to pay them; how many vacation days are given per year, what are the benefits? But this candidate actually asked me what he could do for me personally. I’m impressed.” Even in situations where the match wasn’t there, HMs have been so impressed with this candidate close that they have recommended other companies for the recruiter to call on the candidate’s behalf. It just purely works.

As I said before, John Lewis had a great wit and was always fun to talk to, but he also learned a lot about this recruiting business of which we are all a part. So, thank you John! You’ve made an impact beyond what you ever knew. God speed.

*“The Simple Brilliance of” is one in a series of articles focusing on ideas and techniques from some of the great thinkers, movers and shakers in the field of recruitment who Bob Marshall has had the privilege of meeting and discussing various topics over the past 25 years.

Bob Marshall, CPC, CIPC started in the search business in 1980 and became Western Regional Manager for over 60 Management Recruiters Intl. offices in 1984. In 1986 he founded The Bob Marshall Group, International, training recruiters across the nation as well as the United Kingdom, Malta, and Cyprus. In 1996, he returned to working a desk full time and continues to train recruiters. To learn more about his activities and descriptions of his products and services, contact him directly at: 770-898-5550 or espro@bellsouth.net or www.TheMarshallPlan.org.