

Passive vs Active recruitment

A (brief) Juggle Jobs guide

This guide discusses the difference between Passive and Active recruitment. These terms refer, not to the business need behind filling the role, but to the type of candidate you're looking at.

Active recruitment targets candidates that are actively looking for a new job. They may be jobseekers or they may be in work but dissatisfied with their current role. Whatever the context - they want or need a new job.

Passive recruitment targets candidates who aren't looking. They're (almost certainly) in work and they're probably happy with what they're doing. You want them because of their skills and experience, but they don't necessarily want to work for you... yet.

Passive candidates

Passive recruitment requires a different initial style than what you may be used to. You are trying to entice *them* to a role, so your initial conversations will need to be about 20% more sales-y than normal. You need to spark their interest in both the role and your business. If you're struggling to do that we'd recommend suspending hiring full stop until you've got it figured out.

The most important thing to determine at this early stage is chemistry. If you're targeting them in the first place you're probably sure that their experience or skills makes them right for the role. The work you would normally do further down the line has (in part) already been done. So what you need to determine now is - are they the right fit for your company? You want to learn this as soon as possible - there's no reason pursuing them if they aren't a good match.

During the initial stages you'll have to be prepared to take it slow. Passive candidates are unlikely to want or be able to interview during work hours, so you'll need to meet their requirements. And they could easily decide that they're happy where they are, so don't set your heart on anyone at this point.

Once they've passed the chemistry test, and you've confirmed they aren't totally satisfied with their current employment, it's time to discover what they want/need to *be* satisfied. Don't beat around the bush. Ask them direct questions, and think of it the same way a candidate in an interview would: the more insightful and well-researched your questions are, the more impressive you (and by extension the role/business) will be.

By now your target is probably feeling pretty good about themselves! Everyone likes for other to take an interest, everyone likes to be complimented, everyone likes to feel desired. If you've decided that you're truly interested be mindful that passive candidates can turn into active candidates very quickly - and active candidates might also look elsewhere for a new role (or realise they can push harder for promotion with their current employer). Reminding a fantastic professional that they want more from their career/should consider switching roles is great... unless they take that knowledge (and the work you've done to impart it) elsewhere.

The solution to this? Do your best to accurately gauge their buy-in and then GET IT CLOSED.

You already know that their experience and skills are right for the role. You've decided that they're a cultural fit. If they are enthusiastic don't sit on your hands. Escalate and nab the candidate you've wanted from the start.

Active candidates

In many ways active recruitment is more straightforward because candidates are actively pursuing roles - they probably want what you have, and it's likely incumbent on them to move fast, which matches your needs. But for this section of the guide we're going to assume your opinion of an active candidate is the same as the previously discussed passive candidate - you value their skills and experiences and they seem like a good cultural match. You might not have gone looking for them, but now you've found them, you want them.

Active candidates have time and money pressure to deal with, which might not always benefit you, especially if you're slow moving. Great candidates may also be suffering from interview fatigue, and there's little you can do to account for that. And, from a purely mercenary perspective, their price is likely to go up the longer you prevaricate.

So treat active candidates the same way you would late-stage passive candidates: keep the lines of communication open (in fact, giving out your personal details will make you stand out from other recruiting parties, if you've got a great candidate, consider it) and GET IT CLOSED.

Putting pressure on them is not the way to go, but there's no harm in making it clear that other people are being interviewed. Be explicit about what the next steps are and be ready to close in the next round.

It's not you it's me

So, while active and passive candidate require different opening strategies, the onus is still on you to escalate effectively once you've found a professional you're happy with. Be wary of assumptions. Active candidates won't necessarily come to you (or at least, the best may not, and if you're not chasing the best you aren't doing your job properly). Passive candidates won't necessarily wait around for you to get your ducks in a row. Active vs Passive recruitment is about the ways and manner that YOU communicate.