

*"I'm following up today to check on your status and will let you know what the firm says," I said to my candidate.*

*"I was going to let you know, I got an email from them this morning to schedule an interview," he replied.*

*"That's surprising! Firms usually reach out to me to arrange interviews – I'll check into it."*

I had submitted an associate candidate to an AmLaw 100 law firm through its search firm portal for a recently posted position, listing myself as the point of contact. Instead of receiving a response from the firm confirming my submission, requesting further information, or setting up an initial interview, the firm contacted my candidate directly. What ensued was a time-consuming email correspondence with the law firm recruiter, which tested my resolve and certainly reminded me of some important foundational skills in business and recruiting.

When I learned of the firm's direct outreach to my candidate, I thought a simple, respectful email requesting that I be kept in the loop would get us back on track. But instead, the firm sent a formal reply letting me know that they considered this candidate a *self-apply* submission.

I had checked all the "boxes" with my submission; therefore, I was confused by this response. While frustrated, I told myself to keep cool, the firm must be mistaken, and a quick summary email from me laying out the timeline and relevant facts would straighten this out. I kept it simple but included all the relevant information, letting the recruiter know that I had notified the candidate of the role, that the candidate had provided authorization, had no prior communication with the firm, and that Mestel had a fee agreement in place. Finally, I made sure to confirm that I submitted the candidate via their search firm portal according to their process.

Did that do the trick? *No.*

I then received pushback in a continued back and forth:  
Did you have authorization? *Yes.*  
You didn't submit via the portal? *Yes, I did.*

This was starting to feel *personal*. Nothing I said seemed to make a difference, and it felt like the firm was looking for ways not to accept my submission. I tried to call the recruiter but had no luck reaching her.

Do I give up the submission and a potential fee? *Not quite.*

In a last-ditch effort to figure out the disconnect, I went back to the firm's Careers page, and hit the "Search Firm Submission Portal" button. I took a close look at the search bar and saw that it directed me to the "Self Apply" page instead of the search firm portal. *Progress!*

Under normal circumstances, I would have picked up the phone again and notified them of this technology glitch, but given my experience thus far, I politely emailed a video illustrating the bug. Surely, everything would be resolved by the next morning. The next day, there was an email waiting for me.

When I opened it, I read that their fee agreement had been updated, our agreement was therefore out of date, and they could not honor our submission. *Another road block?*

I decided to try a different approach. I began my response by pointing out that Mestel has a long-term relationship with their firm and then reiterated my previous points about permission and the bug in their portal. A short time later, I received another email. *"We would like to update the fee agreement in order to honor the submission."* Finally, some long-awaited good news! We executed their agreement, so after

## Well THAT Was a Surprise! Keep Cool and Carry On

by Randy Steinberg

countless hurdles and emails, they honored Mestel's submission.

### Lessons Learned

#### Follow Instructions

The first, and most basic takeaway is to carefully review each firm's instructions prior to submission, follow the prompts, and document your process. In this situation, I had followed all the rules and could provide proof of my steps. If I had not, I would have easily lost a potential commission for a simple missed step.

#### Maintain Your Resilience and Keep Your Cool

If a disagreement arises and you can show that you're correct, stay resilient! Don't waste your resilience by letting your emotions get the best of you. Recruiting demands optimal business and social skills. This includes learning to keep your cool in frustrating situations and honing your communications acumen (email, phone, in person, etc.). We don't always get the answers we hope for, but we can always control how we act and react. The back and forth with this recruiter tested my resolve and patience. But maintaining professionalism and diplomatically standing my ground by concisely laying out the relevant facts was critical to achieving a successful result in this situation.

#### Don't Take It Personally

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When we are invested in our work, certain business interactions can feel like a personal test. It's easier to achieve successful results if you remind yourself not to over-personalize. Challenge yourself to recognize that there may be multiple explanations for a person's actions and reactions, and to approach solutions in a collaborative way. Here, even though this felt like the recruiter just did not want to take my submission, there was a technology glitch on her end causing a big gap between us. Most of the time, we won't know the full story about what our business counterparts are going through. Always assume the best, have patience, and plan for the hurdles!

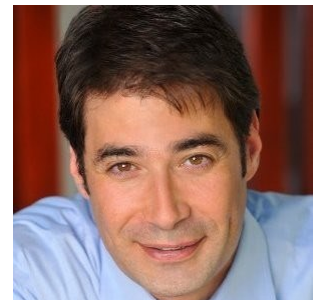
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