

How Headhunters Spell Trouble: 'FD,' 'PP,' 'Noncom' and 'TMI'

By SARAH E. NEEDLEMAN; May 9, 2006; Page B9

Recruiters, like many specialized professionals, have pet words and phrases they pull out regularly at work. These code words can speak volumes about what a search executive is thinking about a candidate. Here is a sampling of terms -- some more common than others -- that search executives say they often rely on when assessing potential hires:

TMI: Short for "too much information," this term refers to candidates who give long-winded answers, according to Jo Bennett, a partner at New York-based Battalia Winston International. "Sometimes candidates talk themselves out of a job," she says. "You want to give the interviewer enough information to make a decision about you, but you don't want to give so much they are able to find something wrong with you." She suggests rehearsing concise answers to interview questions with a friend.

FD: Torrey Foster writes the initials for "factual discrepancy" on résumés when he finds errors. A managing partner at Chicago-based Heidrick & Struggles International Inc., he says a falsified academic credential is one common example. "Recruiters who see a degree listed on a résumé next to a university will presume at face value that you earned it," he says. "When it becomes apparent that you didn't during the course of an interview, you'll have some egg on your face, and your candidacy will be unlikely to advance any further." Mr. Foster says it's acceptable for a résumé to note course work completed toward a degree.

Search virgin: Deborah Sawyer, a partner at Morgan Howard Worldwide in Stamford, Conn., puts this stamp on candidates who don't know how the executive-search business works. A common misconception is the belief that recruiters are responsible for finding them a job, she says. What they sometimes don't know is that recruiters are hired by companies to help them fill positions with qualified talent. Such candidates often voice their disappointment or anger to recruiters, which can derail their chances. "I probably won't ever put them in front of a client," Ms. Sawyer says.

Noncom: Craig Silverman's shorthand for job candidates who lack strong communication skills. An executive vice president at staffing firm HireAbility.com LLC in Salem, N.H. Mr. Silverman says he'll note "noncom" or "NC" at the top of a résumé during an interview. "Look the person in the eye, speak in complete thoughts or sentences and be confident in what you're saying," he says.

PP: Chris Soderlund says this code for "poor presentation" sometimes comes to mind before he even shakes a candidate's hand. Mr. Soderlund, placement director for Ajilon Professional Services, a division of staffing firm Adecco SA, says he assesses a job hunter's look and demeanor the moment he or she sets foot in his Woodland Hills, Calif., office. "Many people don't realize that they should be what we call 'on' as soon as they hit the parking lot of an office," he says. Examples of poor presentation include slouching, hair twirling, treating receptionists rudely and gum chewing, he says. "People notice those things," Mr. Soderlund says. "You want to present an air of professionalism."

Sizzle, preceded by a "down" arrow: Evan Scott, president of Evan Scott Group International in Plymouth Meeting, Pa., makes this note when an interviewee lacks energy and passion. (Upbeat, enthusiastic candidates get "sizzle" and an "up" arrow.) Recruiters want to see candidates express excitement when describing their accomplishments and interest in the job, he explains.

Serial networker: Greg Coleman, a senior client partner in New York at Korn/Ferry International, brands job hunters with this term when they're found to be working with several search executives at once. "Through conversations among recruiters, their names come up," he says. Professionals broadening their search beyond opportunities that match their expertise sometimes fall into this practice, Mr. Coleman says. "It looks like they

are going about their search in a frenzied way."