

Q&A Column
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Email Subject Line: Avoiding “We’ll Find You A Job” Rip-Offs

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Summary:

Question: I was recently contacted and invited in for an “interview” by a career management company. They found my resume online. Since I am not employed I listened to what they had to say, which is that they will guarantee me employment within 12 months for \$7,500 up front. Is there a rule of thumb when it comes to employment services companies, does one usually put money down?

Massimo M., Hamilton, Ontario

Landing Page copy

Headline : Avoiding Rip-Off “Career Management” Firms

Dear Mark,

Question: I was recently contacted and invited in for an “interview” by a career management company. They found my resume online. Since I am not employed I listened to what they had to say. In a nut shell, they stated that they will find me employment that will suit my abilities, character, personality and so on. There is a fee, yet a guarantee that if I am not employed over a stipulated time, I will get my fee back! The fee is approximately \$7,500. Is there a rule of thumb when it comes to employment services companies, does one usually put money down? In conjunction to one’s own due diligence in researching this arrangement, are there specific questions one asks, red flags to keep an eye on and so forth? Thank you for your time.

Massimo M., Hamilton, Ontario

Dear Massimo,

My simple advice to you in this matter is to run. Run like the wind! These so-called career management firms who troll the job banks looking for clients just like you, who ask you for thousands of dollars up front while supposedly guaranteeing you a job (we’ll revisit this “guarantee” in a moment), are essentially vultures who prey on naive, hungry job seekers.

Point one to note is that there is a clear demarcation between genuine career consultants and true recruiting agencies. The folks that contacted you in this case, and who probably put you through a two hour interview that made you feel at times like a star and then desperate, are actually career coaches – but of the worst kind. A legitimate career consultant will *never* guarantee that they will find you a job. Their role is clear: to help you solve your own career issues. This might include how to deal with an irritating supervisor; or position yourself for a promotion; or to search out new employment. In the latter case, they will work with you to assess your skills, interests, values and marketability. Together you will put together a plan of action that will focus your efforts on using job boards (such as Workopolis), networking into the hidden job market, and incorporating recruiting agencies as part of your mix.

Recruiters, headhunters and personnel agencies will never promise you a job either – nor should they be asking you for any money since they get paid by the employer to find them a suitable candidate (see my earlier article on [Types of Recruiting Firms](#) <http://www.workopolis.com/servlet/Content/resource/20060208/cqa20060208?gateway=work>).

How then can this “career management” firm that contacted you charge up to \$7,500 or more for doing what a legitimate career coach could do for a fraction of the price? And how can they promise you a job, when the two key determinants of securing employment - current demand for your skills in the employment market, and the employer’s personal criteria for making a particular hiring decision - are completely out of the career firm’s hands?

It’s all in the nature of the guarantee they provide you in writing. Read it carefully before handing over a penny or signing anything. You’ll generally find a promise that, by *following their methods*, you will *be employed* within 12 months – or you get your money back. Here’s where they get tricky about things. Notice that they will never, ever, outline in their guarantee every single grueling step you may be required to take in order to find a job. More importantly, they will never, ever include in their written guarantee the salary level at which you will be re-employed.

Clever, eh? So if during that 12 months they tell you to perform 100 activities in furthering your search, and you complete only 99 of them, technically you may have invalidated your contract. Also, if you receive an offer during that period as a stock keeper at your local Quickie Mart for \$8.00 an hour, and you turn it down, you may have breached your contract with the career management firm. They get to keep your hard earned money. You’re stuck. And if you think you can take them to court because you believe they made you verbal promises (that is, specific guarantees or agreements that aren’t in writing), you’ll find out quickly that it might cost you more to sue them than you paid them upfront.

But please don’t take my word alone for the advice I’m giving here. Try Googling “Bernard Haldane busted” and read about how the company many of these bottom-feeding career management firms are modeled on had to fold in Canada after their unethical dealings were outed on the investigative TV show W5 a number of years back.

Anyhow, sorry if I sound a bit strident this week. I just hate to see good people be taken advantage of. In the end it is always up to you to produce the effort, and use the right strategies, to find suitable work. No shortcuts available – not even plunking down a ton of moolah hoping someone else will honour a deliberately vague assurance that they’ll do the hard stuff for you.