

How to Work with a Recruiter

According to data from CareerBuilder.com, surgical technologists are in high demand, with 1,000-2,000 positions posted each month around the country. Health care systems often turn to recruiting companies to help them find candidates and fill these positions. AST asked Christen Bonn, recruitment strategist for Ascension, to help you understand how to work with a recruiter.

AST: What does a recruiter do and how do they work with a hospital or healthcare system?

BONN: Recruiters are utilized by hospitals and healthcare systems to be the fulltime search partner for the facility. They are focused 100% on attracting, vetting and assisting candidates through the application process. Great recruiters will proactively search for candidates based on their in-depth knowledge of the position, manager and facility needs.

A recruiter will often go beyond a resume or profile and take time to get to know the candidates they are working with to determine their true potential for success in a role. A recruiter can act as your ally, partner and voice before, during and after the interviewing process. Relying on the recruiter's recommendation and influential abilities on the hiring managers can help great people get into positions. However, while recruiters can influence hiring managers, the hiring decision will ultimately fall to the manager.

AST: How will I know if I'm talking to a recruiter versus the hospital? Does it matter?

BONN: First, there are generally two types of recruiters that work for hospitals and healthcare systems. A corporate recruiter works for one hospital or healthcare system. These recruiters are generally employees and recruit only for that healthcare company. An agency recruiter, works for a staffing firm that may have a variety of clients and potentially has a broader variety of positions and locations to recruit for.

In either circumstance, the recruiter will typically identify themselves as the recruiter for that position or healthcare company. If either type of recruiter is speaking to you about a particular position and helping you through the application process, then chances are good that your information will be seen by the hiring manager.

AST: If I work with a recruiter, will I earn less in salary than if I apply directly with the hospital?

BONN: Generally speaking, working with a recruiter does not have an effect on salary range.

AST: I heard recruiters only work with experienced techs. Is that true?

BONN: Absolutely not! With the demand for surgical techs being extremely high around the country, hospitals and health systems are willing to hire surgical techs straight out of school.

AST: I've just graduated. Do you have any advice for me?

BONN: Make sure your resume looks great and start applying and connecting with recruiters where you want to work. I know it seems obvious, but you have to let people know you are looking for a job. Did you know that something like 87% of recruiters use LinkedIn as a way to connect with applicants? We want to find you!

Create a professional LinkedIn profile and put your resume on CareerBuilder, Monster, and Indeed. Recruiters love those job boards. Where you can, include “surgical technologist,” “surgical technician,” “surgical tech,” and “scrub tech” into your resume copy where it makes sense so your resume will always get picked up by resume search software.

You also have to make sure recruiters know that you have your surgical technologist certification. Add “Certified Surgical Technologist” as the heading on your resume and CST after your name. Put your certification number at the top of your resume so your credential can easily be verified with the NBSTSA.

If a hospital system requires experience, consider one-off positions with the same healthcare system – like an instrument tech, lab tech, patient care representative, medical office specialist, or as a patient care technician – that way you could get your foot in the door and gain valuable healthcare experience. Many times, hiring managers will overlook industry experience in favor of specific system experience. Getting your foot in the door allows you to get to know the managers and other employees at the facility, thus creating relationships that can vouch for your contribution to the team.

If you are still finding that you are unsuccessful in your job search, find a recruiter who is willing to advise you on your resume or interviewing skills. Great recruiters will do this for free and will give you honest feedback about the hurdles you might be facing.

AST: What are employers looking for? Is it important to be certified?

BONN: Employers are looking for skilled employees who also fit the culture of their company and department. Before any interview, do your research on the company you are going to interview with. You can learn a lot about a company’s culture by browsing their website and reading reviews on websites like Glassdoor. Make sure you ask your recruiter any questions about the company or position you may have. Relevant experience is always desired, so work with your recruiter on how to highlight specific areas of your work history.

Certification is becoming more and more of a requirement rather than a preferred qualification. New healthcare laws are putting pressure on companies to employ certified and licensed professionals. If your area of study offers a national certification, get it! Not only does this open you up to new opportunities but it can also help with a higher salary.

AST: When should I follow up after talking to a recruiter? What’s the best way to do that?

BONN: Recruiters work with MANY applicants, so taking the initiative to follow up will save the recruiter a few steps and can allow you to gain understanding of your status as an applicant quicker. Try to connect with your recruiter(s) on a regular basis to cultivate a professional relationship with them. Remember recruiters are busy, so try to keep any phone conversations short and don’t overwhelm them with emails.

Try to follow up once a week or once every other week, so you stay in the forefront of the recruiter’s thoughts but you aren’t pestering them. Keep in mind that if a recruiter receives information about moving you forward in the application process, they will typically call or email right away.

AST: What’s the most common mistake applicants make?

BONN: Applicants can make mistakes at different times during the application process that can affect the outcome of their job search. If you are looking for a job and a recruiter calls, take the call or call them back. They reached out because they saw something that they think would be desirable for their company.

Be candid with your recruiter about what you are looking for in a new position. If you need a certain salary or are only interested in certain positions, let them know so they can focus their search on those things. If a recruiter gives you advice or makes a recommendation that you need to do something for a specific position, follow it! Remember recruiters want to fill their positions. If they suggest making a few changes or focusing the interview on certain topics or avoiding certain topics, it's because they know what the hiring manager wants to see.

Show up on time for the interview. If that means leaving extra early or finding the location the day before, then do that. Arrive for your interview 5-10 minutes early. If you are not able to make it to the interview, call your recruiter and cancel with as much notice as possible. Keep in mind that canceling an interview can sometimes cost you the job, so make sure you are only cancelling for an absolute emergency. Many companies will not give you another shot if you miss the interview without advance notice. Also, last-minute cancellations or no shows will make the recruiter think twice before working with you on other positions.

No matter what the position, dress professionally for the interview (absolutely no jeans). First impressions really do matter! Always bring two or three copies of your resume.

Lastly, don't tell your recruiter one thing and then tell the hiring manager something different. I have had applicants lose a potential offer because they told the hiring leaders different or additional information from what they had shared with the recruiter. Remember the recruiter is setting certain expectations about you to the hiring manager. You don't want it to look like you or the recruiter lied or hid information.

AST: How do I find a recruiter if I want one? What's the benefit of starting my job search that way?

BONN: Start by putting your professional information where recruiters are likely to see it – through resumes posted on job boards, professional social media profiles, applying to job ads and completing applications. It only becomes a matter of time before your resume catches a recruiter's eye. If you would rather dictate which recruiter relationship you want to develop, call the HR departments at the health systems you would like to work for and ask to speak to their recruitment team or call your local healthcare staffing firms to set up an interview.

By starting your job search with a recruiter, you are able to speak with someone about the jobs you are interested in and get feedback on your resume as it pertains to the positions you are applying to. The recruiter can be your greatest ally and source of feedback, so connecting with them early and regularly will only help in knowing about the status of positions.