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PROFESSIONAL MATCHMAKER

Don't settle for a world of point and click job searches

By Julia Dodge



Cynthia Fassler is the owner of TSS-Total Support Services Personal Agency, Inc.

With the accessibility of Monster.com, Craigslist and Yahoo! Hot Jobs, some may think the staffing industry as an archaic form of job placement. But Cynthia Fassler insists there's nothing like hiring an experienced professional to make sure the right person finds the right job.

But when Fassler, the owner and core career recruiter of TSS—Total Support Services Personnel Agency, Inc., insists on ditching the computer and telephone, and asks to meet clients face-to-face, their answers are surprising: "I don't really need to meet you—just send me a good person," they say.

But why would an employer, who's looking for quality employees, not want to better their chances by a personal encounter with their business matchmaker?

"Because people don't have the time," says Fassler, who started the San Francisco agency 26 years ago. "Now everybody is connected to their computer in some fashion. I still want to meet every candidate I'm going to work with, and any client that will allow me to meet with them. I really want to see the office environment, hear the buzz or lack thereof, see how people dress and how they interact with one another. I want to know who has been successful in that position, and if they're still there, can I talk to them? You don't get that from the computer."

In fact, TSS's placement specialist Duane Tapken estimates that in 26 years of business, Fassler has personally interviewed 10 percent of San Francisco's population face-to-face—that's about 80,000 people.

She believes her unwavering dedication to the craft of job placement is what has kept her in business all these years, and three recessions later. "I like TO be that investigator, really finding out who that person is. It's a way of getting people excited about work again, and bringing out their potential."

She considers herself a very open-minded, sponge-like person, able to absorb the feeling of a work environment and able to read a job candidate's best qualities. "I'm also the kind of person who likes a challenge," she says. "You tell me that I can't find that for you, I'll find it for you."

After working for a couple years at a staffing agency that closed, Fassler

realized she had a knack for assessing individual skills and bringing out the best in candidates. She began her own agency with a loan from her father (who wouldn't lend her money until she created a business plan), and within three years she had paid him back.

At the beginning, Fassler worked from home, and then from an executive suite for a couple of years, providing clients with a business center, containing a postage machine and copier. At that time, phone calls were a dime from a public phone. "I had a friend who owned a bar and restaurant in the Embarcadero, and he would let me use his payphone downstairs in his restaurant to call my clients to set up appointments," she says. "I'd just walk downtown with a couple rolls of dimes in my pocket and cold call."

Fassler says the staffing business has always been female dominant. "It's not an easy business, but it was an easier business to get into and to open. At that time I started there were a lot of women owners, and I'd say that there's only a handful of us left that are boutique-size agencies. A lot of my colleagues got purchased by the big guys, but there's still a few of us hold outs." On that note Fassler remarks that she chose not to sell her business because she "still likes working a desk."

She also believes it's the personal nature of the service that attracts the women to the industry. "At that time, unfortunately the career path for women was teachers, nurses, secretaries... really girly industries. But if you didn't want to be a teacher, but still wanted to help, you could have a personnel agency and become a personnel counselor." Of course now they're referred to as either consultants, placement specialists or recruiters.

About four years into her business, TSS went from a purely temp agency to fulltime placement, simply because of requests from businesses that were so pleased with her temporary placement that they wanted

her to find direct-hire people. "It can be stressful keeping up with the times, though," Fassler admits. "The legalities, the compliance issues, the mandatory health care and sick leave issues—I constantly have to keep up with what's going on in the marketplace."

But hard work is something that Fassler is used to. She interviews, screens, proficiency tests, and does background and criminal checks on all job candidates. "Then it's up to me to send the employer my top three, and then they choose. They don't have to weed through hundreds of unqualified resumes, schedule interviews and have them not show up, no background checking... now we're back to 'How much is your time worth?'"

And with such thoroughness, it's surprising that Fassler has time for all of her extra activities: she's been the VP of California Staffing Professionals (CSP), a member of the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce, and as a current board member of the National Association of Women Business Owners' (NAWBO) San Francisco chapter, she has chaired the organization's flagship event, "Leaders & Legends Luncheon," for the past two years, for which she was recently named NAWBO's Member of the Year.

For Fassler, it's about sharing her experience and helping others find a job they can enjoy as much as she does hers. "I really love what I do. I feel really blessed to get up every morning, come to San Francisco—the city in which I grew up—and own my business here," she says. "I'm so fortunate that I can make a difference."