

# TAKING THE STRESS OUT OF FINDING STAFF WITH FIRST CHOICE RECRUITMENT

By Jackie Anderson

**I**'ve experienced both sides of recruitment agencies: as a candidate, as a temp, and when hiring staff for my own business, so I met with Russell Hood of First Choice Recruitment keen to find out what the world of hiring staff looks like from the perspective of the recruitment expert.

Set up in Gibraltar in 2010 and with Russell firmly at the helm since 2011 providing over thirty years of recruitment expertise, First Choice Recruitment has steadily established itself as one of Gibraltar's leading recruitment agencies, supplying temporary and permanent staff to a wide range of Gibraltar's businesses across a broad range of sectors. "Establishing a business anywhere is always a challenge," Russell acknowledges, "so from early on we have worked on steadily developing relationships with local businesses,"

Having moved to Gibraltar from the UK after many years' working in the recruitment sector in London, Russell could count on a vast experience of the twists, turns and unique quirks of the world of recruitment. As anyone who has had any dealings with hiring and managing staff will appreciate, there is a great skill to finding the right person with the right skills and also with the right personality for your organisation. "Business is as much about people as it is about processes and services," he opines, "and recruitment is about finding the best people to fit perfectly into your business."

With the focus firmly on people and relationships, First Choice Recruitment turned its attention in the early days to Gibraltar's finance sector. "We work on building relationships with local businesses and get to know their field, their work, what their ambitions are and in particular, we get to know how they tick, what the organisation's personality is like, its culture," explains Russell, "it

takes time, but it does mean that we can then pull out all the stops to make sure that we help them select exactly the right candidate for any vacancies they have. We are there to help clients grow and develop their businesses by helping them bring the right set of skills that they need at the right time."

As their credibility and their reputation grew, First Choice Recruitment expanded to work with a wide variety of sectors and with various sizes of companies. "Our approach to building relationships means that we have a strong network of people, both as potential candidates and as clients who need them. We can supply large, international companies with temporary teams of staff to bridge a particularly busy period, and we can provide a small company with a team member who will stay with them for years," explains Russell.

The process of hiring staff is made remarkably easy for employers by Russell and his team. "We do the leg work,"



he smiles, "from advertising a vacancy, making sure everything is appropriately registered with the ETB if required, to initial interviews and shortlisting, checking references and work permits and assisting with interview strategies and techniques to help the business make the final choice." Fee structures are straight-forward and the business only gets the bill once a candidate starts work. "It is essential for us to make sure that we find the best candidate to fit the post and the business," Russell adds, "and that often means that we search for candidates who can offer that little bit extra to the post, perhaps because of their experience or their qualifications."

This led us instantly to a discussion on age and recruitment. Russell often works with semi-retired professionals who have years of skills and experience to offer a business but want to take a back seat role, away from the hotbed of career progression. "These professionals often have skills that go way beyond the remit of the vacancy that we are trying to fill," says Russell, "but are only too pleased to both downscale, and offer their expertise." These candidates are ideal for small businesses which need to

tap into experts but cannot necessarily afford consultants or who are considered too small for success-hungry young candidates. "We have often found that it is important for SME's to hire the right person quickly and avoid the costs of having to re-hire or re-advertise. We do all the legwork of finding candidates for companies so that they can get on with running the business."

Russell took time to explain the ins and outs of how a recruitment agency functions, and it was fascinating to learn about the amount of work and effort that goes into matching candidates and vacancies. I learned, for example, that for a business that appears to work on reacting to demand from clients, there is a good deal of planning. "Many businesses have cycles of when they are particularly busy, or when they need temporary cover during popular holiday periods," Russell explains, "and we liaise with our clients to help them plan ahead so that they can consider covering staffing gaps with temps and therefore not have interruptions to service to their own clients."

"Access to a skilled and flexible work force is essential for businesses in this day and age and in the case of temporary staff, First Choice Recruitment is the employer, so we deal with all the contract issues, payroll, tax and social insurance issues. If the business finds it is not getting on with a particular temp then we replace with another and deal with any disciplinary issues that may arise." This is a statement which must bring a sense of relief to those small businesses struggling to cover staff annual leave. Russell is quite clear that working with his team does not mean HR managers are under threat. "Quite the contrary," he smiles, "we work very closely with HR managers who have a very different role to ours. We are a support to their recruitment arm, and more often than not we help companies to make best use of their recruitment budgets by taking on some of those mundane activities such as looking for staff with the right skills, filtering applicants, and shortlisting, leaving the HR department free to handle all the work that they need to deal with on a day to day basis. Drawing from our large and growing network of candidates saves them time as well as money."

"We do much more than just advertise jobs," grins Russell. And therein, I suspect, lies the secret of their success.

Our discussion, over numerous cups of coffee, is wide-ranging. How about Brexit, I ask, how is that going to affect getting staff into posts, especially if there are issues around freedom of movement? Of course, the short answer is that neither of us knows – who can accurately predict the unprecedented? But, after an initial period of what appeared to be stunned silence immediately after the referendum result was announced, Russell was happy to note that business has become even more brisk than usual. "It's as if," he muses, "businesses in Gibraltar have shaken themselves up and are defiantly determined to ride the waves and achieve even greater successes. There is a wonderful positive attitude among our clients, and First Choice Recruitment is as busy as ever."

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