



## Getting the best results from your recruitment process

### Recruiting in the **Financial Services** Sector

SandringhamWood

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I'm Jess from Sandringham Wood Recruitment. We specialise in recruiting within the financial services profession. We're based in Bristol, however, we do work with clients across the UK, one of which is FE, a leading, independent provider of investment data and analytical software. I'm today joined by Emma Hanney who is the HR manager of FE. She'll be spending the next 20 minutes or so with me. Welcome, Emma. Could you tell me a bit about yourself and FE as a business?

*Emma: Hi, Jess. Yes. I am a chartered member of CIPD. I have been working in HR most probably over 20 years. I joined FE a little under 5 years ago at a point in their journey where they felt it was important to add a qualified HR member to their team. Prior to that, I'd worked in Law, and I joined a very dynamic, fast-growing company who had a lot of exciting challenges, which were part of their growth journey. So it was all something that really made me believe that I could add value to FE and its proposition to the HR element.*

Okay. When we look at the industry at the moment right across the sector, whether you're in a technical services company or whether you're in traditional financial planning, there seems to be quite a skill shortage. So how important do you feel employer branding, in order to attract candidates to FE, is important for you?

*Emma: It is really critical. I think there are lots of people that are realising the importance. You have sites like Glassdoor who basically ask people to rate their experiences. I think we have an employee shortage and we have a skill-set shortage. We want to get the best people for FE, the right fit in terms of skills, knowledge, and behaviour. You've got to work hard to ensure that you're delivering on all your promises. It starts from the moment people access your website, to how they're dealt with in terms of when they*



*approach you as a company. And, indeed, for us, we take it very seriously from not only the recruitment process, even the people that don't get a job offer, we make sure that hopefully they go away feeling disappointed rather than relieved. So it's really important that we are approachable, responsive, and that we don't forget that we're dealing with human beings at the end of the day.*

I agree totally. I noticed recently that you've had your website upgraded, which looks fab now. I know that we've discussed the development plans that you have for the career side of it. It's looking brilliantly better than it was before. There's obviously work that you still want to do on that from a candidate attraction point of view, isn't there?

*Emma: Absolutely. We have a vision of maybe putting some videos of actual people talking about their experiences. We launched last year our fixed 2-year graduate program. There was a lot of work that we put into the people side of our site as a result of trying to attract that type of talent. It was important that our site (as we deal with financial data, financial products; we're a technical company as well, and we sit between IT and finance), to drive home the importance of people that deliver our products, people deliver our knowledge, and without those people feeling engaged and motivated, the company wouldn't be half as good as it is today. So it's really important to have engaged people that feel that they haven't been short changed, that what you've shown on your website is the reality.*

*I think people like honesty. People like sincerity. No one expects the perfect company. No company is perfect. What they want is an accurate representation of what you can do as a business for them, how you will engage them, and hopefully fulfil some of their career aspirations as well. So the website is an important window. We want it to make the people side, our careers page, feel like they were real people. Pictures say a thousand words, so that was important; not to have models, but real, live FE employees. Also trying to be as clear and upfront about what a journey would look like with the company from the point of once you approach us, whether it be directly or by an agency, and then what it would look like going forward. In terms of agencies, I think that's really important for a company to really think about the people that they work with. As you know, Jess, it's a really competitive industry and I most probably have ten to twenty calls, sometimes a day, from people looking at our careers page, wanting to do business with us.*

*Actually, most probably, I work with two or three regularly, not necessarily for the same types of jobs because we're very diverse in both what we do as a business and the skill-sets we need. I think we've worked very hard to develop a good relationship, so that we're being represented by third parties really well. Those sorts of relationships are invaluable, so working with the likes of yourself has been really important, particularly with our distribution side of our business, that IFA kind of wealth management side of the business. That's been really critical.*

It's been good working with you too on that basis because I've been able to bring my experience in dealing with the IFA market into your business and it has worked really quite well. I think that a lot of firms can learn a lot from this where, as we've discussed previously, where they chuck their one vacancy out to ten different recruitment companies. Basically all they are doing is pitching one against the other creating a CV race. Unfortunately, you in HR, don't really have the time to spend briefing properly ten, twelve different recruitment companies. So everything gets watered down and you don't get the best representation for your business, rather than if you work with a small handful of select recruiters that get you and your business. It all helps with the candidate attraction and the employer branding to help represent you in the best possible way.



*Emma: Absolutely. I think it is difficult. As you say, we've sometimes in certain areas, got skill shortages. We as an HR service to the wider business have metrics that we have to perform against. However, it is important, I think, to keep your nerve as an HR manager to really work hard at developing good relationships with the people that you work with. I think one of the critical things is keeping people updated and regularly informed. Now, for you and I, we both are very passionate about that user experience, making sure that we are dealing with stakeholders the way we would like to be dealt with ourselves. It sounds a bit cliché. I don't want it to sound like an infomercial, but that really is the approach that you and I have adopted.*

*We've worked well together because that is the expectation you set with your applicants. That's the expectation you set with me. That's my expectation. I want to work with people that represent the company well, but if something went horribly wrong - it hasn't happened with you I'm pleased to say - if I got a dearth of candidates that were just like, "What am I getting?" I would be able to go back and have a really honest chat. I think you are an extension of the HR function, so we need to select who we work with carefully. We need to respect that relationship. I will always be transparent with you. If I'm going to other people as well as you, it will only be a handful, but I'm always upfront. We know where we stand. I think that's really important. To start from a position of trust, you make sure that people that are helping with that recruitment search understand your business and will support it and mirror the kind of conduct that is critical to you as an organisation as well. We've been very lucky actually.*

We have similar values, making sure that we have the same high standards and the same values and the same benchmarks of what we're looking to achieve. What would you say a good interview process looks like? How would you ensure, as a business, that you and the candidate get the most out of it and what are the dos and don'ts?

*Emma: Well, I think the candidates' experience should be faultless. We should meet them in a timely fashion. I don't really support running late. If someone's coming and doing the courtesy of attending an interview at a particular time, then it's important that I don't keep them waiting. We try very much to put people at their ease. I don't know the individual, I've got what they do on their CV and I'm trying to get an understanding of who they are. Everyone is different and it's important in terms of team fit to make sure that (not that I'm getting the same types of people, far from it) the environment that I'm going to be putting that candidate into is going to be somewhere where I feel they can flourish.*

*We also factor in objective metrics, so we do have a variety of assessments. Face-to-face interviews, there is always value to that, however I think never base your decisions on assumptions. Don't be frightened to challenge, to explore, and to test those skill-sets. You've got to try and do it in a sort of timely fashion as well. We try and keep momentum. We try and keep the process maybe to two-stage ideally. Sometimes it has to be three-stage and that obviously will be impacted by the level of the job that we're looking to resource. We're respectful and flexible of people's diaries, their personal & work commitments. I think for us, it's about giving excellent support, ensuring that people get feedback as well in a timely fashion, that we don't keep people waiting. If there are delays, we're keeping the candidate or the agency fully briefed, so that ultimately people feel cared for, like they matter.*

*Some of the things I've heard from people out looking for jobs, is sometimes they can go for an interview and then they don't get it, they don't get any feedback. People are sometimes very worried about giving feedback. They feel it's quite a litigious sort of area. As long as you've got good recruitment processes in place and you're being objective on the things you're assessing, that shouldn't be an issue.*



*Sometimes it will be down to personalities. Sometimes it will be the fact that the management style of a particular person and what the candidate is looking for is never going to mesh. I think that's critical. We're also about building our line managers' awareness on how to treat staff, keeping them up to date, working with them to really build that awareness of that diversity. You might deal with a number of people in a particular way, however when someone new comes into the group, they might learn things differently, they may be engaged in different ways, and, really, if you can adapt to that diversity, you become more valuable yourself. The whole thing, both components, both the business and the person coming into the business are critical, it's important they're both gelling together and coming together as positively and as timely as possible. So I think it's good communication, regular updates, even if there isn't anything specific, just making someone feel that they matter. A wall of silence will always reflect badly. I also believe that you should try to make something feel personal, sending out generic, "Hello. Sorry it wasn't successful..." emails don't work...*

Yes, I agree - rubbish.

*Emma: People I think are getting tired of that. There is a balance. I get that. I actually went to a workshop the other day and it was with a law firm. The solicitor there, who is a lovely guy, said, "Do you know, I'd do away with the minute manager. Sometimes people think speed is better than quality." I don't agree with that. I think you can work hard and fast, and you should never lose sight of what you're trying to communicate. You just have to be careful that you're treating people as individuals. I think be very aware that people will go to the outside world and will criticise you if you're not delivering. So, outside your control, they're rating you and saying, "That was a terrible experience. Never go near them. They said this and this is what they delivered."*

Who else might they tell in the process as well? We all know that people share bad news wider and greater than good news.

*Emma: Everyone likes a bit of bad news, don't they?*

Also, one of my favourite sayings, going back to feedback and giving news to people, is "no news is news to a candidate". So, when somebody goes completely quiet, we have to chase and chase for feedback of some description. It's a very difficult, challenging position to put the recruiter in because we're trying to keep everyone happy. Not only are we trying to keep the company happy, we're trying to keep the candidate happy and keeping people warm in the process. Even if it's to say this or that has happened, we've got a series of meetings, we can't get back to you until such and such a day, that's fine.

We have so many ways of now communicating with candidates, whether it be a quick text message to keep them updated or drop them an email. Quite often what we tend to nowadays is drop candidates emails on a Friday afternoon, just to give them a weekly status of where we're at with their interview process. Just keeping people informed and treating people like you want to be treated yourself – and I know you've touched on that as well – there are so many circumstances where we seem to lose sight of that. I was only talking to someone funnily enough over the weekend who is also in HR and we were talking about there being so many methods of communications these days. There's so much social media. There's so much this, there's so much that. Have we actually lost sight in communicating?

*Emma: I think so.*

Is it communication overload?



## Interview with Emma Hanney from FE

*Emma: I think people just forget that human contact is critical. For instance, at work, I know and I encourage all staff to really have those informal chats and communicate because that's how you build relationships. That's how you get somebody to care about things. For instance, we're a global business and some of our teams sit outside the UK. We really moved away from email to Skyping, just because that contact, that facial contact, that looking at someone in the eye and building that relationship is critical to someone actually caring about you. I think, yes, we've gone too far the other way.*

*We've seen the likes of social media as being almost the way to communicate. It's there to support. It should never be the only way. I think phones, talking – something that's critical with me with the agencies that I work with is that I do not like people that just volume send me loads of CVs, where it's clear they haven't really done their homework. They haven't spoken. They've given no time and effort. It drives me mad. I think sadly for you there are so many agencies that can fall into that category. For the good people, and there are, as I work with some excellent people, it's kind of like you're having to overcome at times that cynicism, like, "Oh, yeah, okay, you're different. I've heard that a million times."*

*I can say the people that I work with, I know they spend time with people and they will be honest. If they've got good people, but they're not right for FE, then that's the way it should be. I'd much rather that that work goes on and the people that actually turn up to our offices for the first interview are there because they want to be and are excited. This is so important. I think what I would say is, of course, we've got to balance the needs of the business, of course we've got to do things in a timely fashion, but you've got to have the quality and just have trust in the people that work with you. If you spent the time and have given them the proper sort of information, so they feel supported, it doesn't have to be a very long, protracted affair. I think keep the momentum, keep candidate's updated, make sure that what you're posting or the kind of image of your firm that you're creating is actually supported by the reality. No one is expecting perfection. People like honesty and I think to be aware that a company has good self-awareness and is just looking to always improve and grow.*

*I think a lot of people that have been interviewed by yourself have come away with that sort of opinion of the business. I know from the feedback that I've taken, it's been a very honest interview with a good insight, transparency, things that need improving, the things that the business is working towards, the fact that you are an entrepreneurial company. You don't rest on your laurels. I think when people come away from having had an interview with FE on that basis, they're quite excited about it. Even if they don't end up necessarily, as you said earlier, getting the job, they still feel that they've had a pretty good insightful, open and transparent interview, which I think is what interviewing ought to be about.*

*Emma: Absolutely. Do you know what? I think that's really what it's about. If you believe what you're saying, then I think that's a very compelling thing. If you're passionate about something and it comes through, I don't subscribe to the sort of interviews that put people on edge. I'm not saying I don't believe in asking challenging questions or exploring or testing certain statements, I want people to feel relaxed. To me, I know - and I don't want it to come across as arrogant – I think any HR manager worth his/her salt will know that if you're honest and you treat people well, it can only do good.*

*When people come to our offices, once they've gone through all the processes and the tests and assessments, when I meet with them, pretty much everyone comes away with wanting to come back for a second interview, which I think says it all. We're not selling a dream. We're selling FE as it is. As you said, entrepreneurial, very dynamic company that's got personality and has got some great people in it. Very diverse, all sorts of different people, and it is at the end of the day, at the moment, the people that deliver. I went to one HR conference where this business person sat up in front of us who was talking about artificial intelligence and saying that was going to be big. Until that day comes, until we're all*



*replaced, it's treating people as people and, yes, it stood us well I think. We've grown a lot over the last four to five years since I've been here, and we've got some great people, so it works for us.*

You're clearly doing something right. There is a candidate shortage, which was what we started the conversation about and it's not just good enough now for companies to get someone in front of them and say, "Well, why are you here? What can you do for us? Where could you add value?" Yes, those are the questions you'd want to ask, but it's a two-way thing and you should also be – or companies should – be selling themselves to the candidate. "This is why you should want to come and work for us." Some companies get it so wrong and they're still treating it very much old-school, like they're in the driving seat. Thinking there's always candidates falling over themselves to work for companies is not necessarily the case. It has to be a two-way thing really.

*Emma: Oh, absolutely. I think if you go in slightly arrogant and almost dismissive, a feeling that you're the one that's going to be calling all the shots, I think you will be rudely awakened. Obviously, we're competing against some companies that have got hugely impressive brands out there, they're household names. However, we are getting there, how we're getting there is we are encouraging people to rate us. We're very involved in the communities that we have our offices. We're very big on CSR. That's critical to us, and, indeed, that's something that really comes through. People want to work for companies that have got a conscience as well.*

*I think in the financial sector, where people can be quite dismissive or too readily wanting to say everyone as bad, making lots of money, they're all horrible and don't have a moral compass. That's far from true. I think it's important that you build a positive image – build that awareness. We've got great rewards, we've got great people, and it's important that you market it that way as well. There's lots of tips and tricks to do that, definitely when people come to our business, we say to them, "Please, rate us. Go to these sites and say how you found us and hopefully you've had a good experience." That helps build the brand and getting out there as well, making yourself known.*

And changing people's perception of financial institutions in some way?

*Emma: Yes, absolutely. I think that's important because they do a lot of good and they bring a lot of work and they have some great people. It's not all bad; with any sector, you have the good and the bad. It's important that you do as much as you can to promote your business as accurately as possible.*

Emma, thank you so much for your time today. It's been great talking with you and to hear all your views.

I look forward to talking with you soon.

*Emma: Thanks very much, Jess. Take care.*



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