

## **Direct Hire and Temporary Staffing Agency**



**Karen Wishart**  
*President & CEO*  
**Curzon Staffing**

**CEOCFO: Ms. Wishart, would you tell us the approach to staffing at Curzon?**

**Ms. Wishart:** I acquired Curzon, which is in its 28<sup>th</sup> year of existence, two years ago. I am new to the staffing industry and saw this acquisition as an opportunity to re-invent the industry and its approach. I wanted to use my experience being on the other side of the table as a customer of staffing companies to innovate a very traditional business. At Curzon, we have a laser focus on our client needs and our goal and mission is to “turn our clients into raving fans” by doing what is needed to make their jobs easier. We use a process that we developed to find our clients talent that are uniquely suited to their companies or associations on a temporary basis, a direct hire or permanent basis. We also use a similar process in our executive search practice.

**CEOCFO: What are some concrete examples of what you do that is not traditionally done in the industry?**

**Ms. Wishart:** I will give you an example of a search that we did for a head of sales business development for one of our clients. They came to us because they had gone to a number of other staffing and search companies to try to find them a business development person. It was a full time director level position. We took the same approach that we would use for searching for a Chief Revenue Officer or other similar senior level position. They sent us a job description and which outlined the following requirements: five to seven years experience and someone who had successfully introduced a new product line. That is it in a nutshell and this is what they had given the other unsuccessful search companies.

We approached the search a little differently. We sat down and asked the client to tell us how the Director of Business Development would spend an average day. With this information, we broke the position down into buckets of time. What we found when we did that is that the three most important things for the client were the ability to do sales presentations, to close a deal, and to manage clients. This gave us a better idea of who we were looking for. For example, two candidates who have the five to seven years, who have introduced a new product and have met or exceeded their sales quotas, could have very different backgrounds. One of them may have spent a significant amount of time doing that research, getting a list of people to call and doing cold calls. A second person could have the same five to seven years, but have spent his/her time closing deals, managing clients, preparing and doing sales presentations. Both on paper look the similar, but because we took the time to ask ourselves how this person was going to spend his/her day and what is most important to our client, we were able to find the ideal candidate to present. As a footnote, our candidate was ultimately selected, and has been with them for about a year, and most importantly, has just been hitting the ball out of the park for the client.

**CEOCFO: How do you work with prospective employees to understand what they know besides what is on their resume?**

**Ms. Wishart:** We use the same process with our candidates that we do with our clients. Our interviews with our candidates tend to be a little bit longer than most staffing or search companies. On the temporary side, our initial interviews last for approximately 45 minutes and on the direct hire, executive search side, the first interview can go for about an hour and a half. We drill down through every single position that they have held and divide their responsibilities into “buckets of time.” We always ask questions that we think our clients are interested in. For example, we may ask them to tell us one thing they did that impacted the company’s bottom line - either saved the company money or made the company money. We have heard some creative things that when we are matching them with our clients we can say to them look we have an office manager here who saved 23% on the money that they were spending for supplies because

she had a “Supplies Drive” where she told the office staff to bring all the extra supplies that they were not using and were hoarding in their desks. At the “Supplies Drive” for each supply an employee brought in, she/he was allowed to choose something brought in by someone else. That was a great story that ultimately helped distinguish this employee from other candidates for the client.

We try to find out what makes each of our candidates unique. On the flip side, we are also very honest with our candidates and keep them honest. We have access to a battery of over 1000 tests which can test everything to Sales drive, customer service, Microsoft office skills, html coding ability, accounting knowledge, software knowledge, etc. Thus, someone who positions himself as an expert in Excel will be tested. Unfortunately there are times when the test scores indicate that the person is not as expert as they thought/portrayed. In cases like this, we provide them with tutorials and we suggest ways that may improve their skills. If they follow through with training, we will retest them. We try to strive for finding potential employees who are in the top 20% in each of the skill sets that we cover, so we are confident when we send them out to our clients.

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**CEOCFO: *Have you changed your approach since you have taken over the company?***

**Ms. Wishart:** When I came in to the business, there was a machine that was in place where the team looked for good resumes, met the candidate and sent them out to clients. Again, having been on the other side of the desk, I knew that even the most skilled person might not be a fit for the client. For example, when I was a chief legal officer and I would ask an agency to send me a paralegal for a three-month project and I was always stunned that I would get someone who knew nothing about our business or our industry. Maybe that person was a great litigation paralegal but they were not a very good entertainment/business affairs paralegal. At first, I thought by just getting our team to focus on the needs of the client putting themselves into the client’s position, it would turn the ship and get them to send out the candidates that our clients needed. It evolved to how do we insure that the clients are getting what they need and want. That’s when we started to break down the positions into buckets of time and I decided that we have to spend more time visiting our clients. We have to see where our clients are, their business culture and what they are doing. After we have done all of this, then we go to market to find people. Curzon Staffing used to have a long mission statement but now we moved to a very simple mission statement - “turn our clients into raving fans!”

**CEOCFO: *How does a potential client find Curzon in a search?***

**Ms. Wishart:** We get a lot of our clients is through referrals from existing clients. We try to treat every client as that special client. We get a number of new clients through our website [www.curzonstaffing.com](http://www.curzonstaffing.com) and through search vehicles. Some new clients have dealt with other agencies and have not been happy or they are not getting what they need out of that agency at the particular time, so they are looking to give someone else a chance.

**CEOCFO: *Are you able to tell if a company is willing to take the time with you to get a better result?***

**Ms. Wishart:** There are companies who will absolutely say that they do not have the time for our process. We tell them it is kind of like a computer in that the data you put in is going to impact the data that comes out. For the most part, when we set up that time with a new client or a returning client and go through our process the client will say they have never put through a process like that before and it was great. Even our candidates will say they have never been interviewed like the way we do before. For the most part, both clients and candidates are welcoming of the new approach when we explain what we are doing and why we are doing it.

**CEOCFO: *Is there a particular type of company that tends to work with Curzon?***

**Ms. Wishart:** We tend to work with midsized companies, associations and not-for-profits. Because of my background, we tend to have a number of media and entertainment business from small production companies, to mid-sized media businesses, all the way up to big networks or groups of networks. .

**CEOCFO: *There is so much competition in your industry. How do you jump out immediately from the competition?***

**Ms. Wishart:** We stand out in a couple of ways. We are a boutique firm where the owner is involved in the day-today operation of the company. A client can get me on the phone immediately and more importantly, I will know who that client is and be familiar with their business. We are involved in our Alexandria community and unlike some of our larger competitors each dollar that we earn in revenue is recycled in our local community versus leaving the area to a corporate

headquarters in another state. When I came in, the previous owner who had built a nice business was happy with what they were doing and the clients they had. She had never done any real marketing of the business other than to put up a website and the site was antiquated. It would have been a beautiful site in 1995, but not for today's business. We just re-launched a new site ([www.curzonstaffing.com](http://www.curzonstaffing.com)) a couple of weeks ago. We are now starting our marketing push. Most of the marketing will be through social media and through our website. We will be doing workshops and events and finding ways to really engage our clients and candidates. We have not had an issue in standing out and I think a lot of that has to do with the service we provide and that we have been in Alexandria Virginia for 28 years so we are known within the community. Most of our clients are in the Alexandria and Washington, Maryland DMA.

**CEOCFO: *Why choose Curzon staffing?***

**Ms. Wishart:** Candidates and clients should choose Curzon staffing because we are a boutique company that provides unique solutions to both candidates and clients. We take the time to find out the clients business needs and what the career path is for candidates and help them determine the direction for which they are best suited. If you choose Curzon you will get a company that is going to be your partner and not just for the immediate needs but for your future needs as well.

Interview conducted by: Lynn Fosse, Senior Editor, CEOCFO Magazine

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## **Curzon Staffing**

For more information visit:  
[www.curzonstaffing.com](http://www.curzonstaffing.com)

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