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The Five Stages of Grief in Hiring: A Cautionary Tale for Office Technology Dealers (and Candidates)

By Scott Cullen

Delayed decisions and rushed hires result in real consequences.

Recruiting in the office technology industry isn't just about resumes and interviews; it's an emotional rollercoaster. Sometimes it's joyful. Sometimes it's maddening. And sometimes, it closely mirrors Dr. Elizabeth Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance.

But don't worry, this isn't a doom-and-gloom tale. Think of it as a lighthearted reality check, courtesy of Copier Careers' President Paul Schwartz and Senior Vice President Jessica Crowley, who together bring 45 years of recruiting experience to the table.

Stage 1: Denial

"We're fully staffed. We're good. Really."

It usually starts innocently enough. Schwartz says the classic response they hear from dealers is: "Don't worry about it. I'm fully staffed."

"That might be denial—or delusion," said Schwartz. "What I don't understand is if we're offering an amazing sales rep, a technician trained on your OEM, a manager who's grown a business, or a back-office person who knows e-automate inside and out, why wouldn't you at least want to talk to that person and know the widest range of people you could and network with them?"

Even if it doesn't lead to a hire, it's an opportunity to gain market insights or learn about a competitor or find out what the next generation of professionals looks like.

Schwartz contends that everybody needs to talk to everyone. "There are always some weak players on every team, and if everything were even, somebody would consider replacing them," he said. "We can't possibly know who all those weak players are in every organization. So, it's just another reason that they should listen and consider anyone we send to them as a candidate."

Crowley observes the same pattern among candidates. "When a candidate says they're not open to a conversation about an opportunity right in their backyard, why would you not be open to a conversation to at least hear what the potential is?" she said. "Unless you're the owner, you don't know what changes could be coming with your current employer."

Copier Careers is a recruiting firm dedicated exclusively to helping copier channel employers find experienced service techs, copier sales reps, managers, controllers, back office staff, and MPS/MNS experts. Learn more about our commitment to the industry at www.CopierCareers.com.

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Stage 2: Anger

"Why didn't I take that call?"

When the crisis hits—a key employee quits, performance tanks, or candidates dry up—frustration sets in.

"On the client side, they're panicking because they know they should have had that conversation with us earlier," said Crowley. "They're angry they didn't let us help them build their bench."

On the candidate side, anger arises when they realize the opportunity they passed on is now gone. "They're frustrated they didn't respond to the voicemails, emails, and texts that a recruiter left them," noted Crowley. "Now they can't bargain like they could have and get the compensation they probably could have before."

While clients and candidates rarely direct that frustration at the recruiter, it still lingers. "It's not that they call us yelling," Crowley added, "but they put it on themselves. They know they should've made the time."

Stage 3: Bargaining

"Just find me someone. Anyone. Please."

Desperation leads to shortcuts.

"On the client side, they'll make a hiring decision much quicker than expected, possibly choosing someone they wouldn't have selected otherwise if they weren't in such a rush," observed Crowley.

"And on the candidate side," she added, "they might take a job that isn't the best fit for their background or skillset just because it's available now, and they need to feed themselves or their family."

Schwartz explains that sometimes those urgent hires come after years of indecision. "We just onboarded a client we've been talking to about the same position for years," he said. "And within three weeks, we had three candidates interviewing."

Crowley added, "They said, 'We've been wanting to do this forever, just never pulled the trigger.' Within a week, they hired two people, one for a position I wasn't even searching for. I just knew a great candidate was available."

Stage 4: Depression

"This is harder than I thought."

Once the adrenaline fades, reality can hit hard.

"Clients often expect we'll have a dozen candidates lined up and ready to go, then the reality hits that it's extremely hard to find qualified people in this industry," said Crowley.

And sometimes the candidates they passed on are no longer available or weren't as 'plug and play' as they hoped. "They may have to go back to someone they previously rejected," Schwartz noted, "and invest in training whether that's in sales, service, or administration."

Crowley highlights another source of frustration: "Sometimes clients are shocked by what the market demands in terms of compensation. That can lead to tough decisions, like increasing pay or re-evaluating their entire team."

"That stark dose of reality is what can be depressing when they finally understand what the market is really like and how niche this industry is," added Schwartz.

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Stage 5: Acceptance

"Okay. Let's do this right."

Eventually, the dust settles. Emotions fade. And what's left is a practical path forward.

Acceptance is about seeing the bigger picture. People leave. Teams evolve. But that doesn't mean you can't come out stronger. "You have to be eternally optimistic," said Schwartz. "Sad and frustrating things happen, but it's how you deal with them and come out the other side. Yes, it's frustrating and emotional at times, but if you get the right people in place, six months or a year down the road, you're a stronger organization for it."

He adds, "I can't think of many hires where the client says, 'We're only hiring this person because there's no one else.' There's always something they see in the candidate that gets them excited."

The Wrap Up

Hiring and recruiting are emotional journeys for employers and candidates alike. Denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance don't always follow a straight path, but the emotions are real. The key is recognizing where you are and having a partner to help guide you through.

As Schwartz puts it, "It's not software. It's not hardware. It's people. And that makes all the difference."