

## **HEADHUNTERS**

Matchmaking in the Labor Market

Cornell University Press, 2002.

William Finlay; James E. Coverdill

Headhunters--third-party agents paid a fee by companies for locating job candidates--perform a unique sales role. The product they sell is people, matching candidates with jobs and companies with candidates. Headhunters affect the professional lives of thousands of employees every day, and their work has a profound, though hidden, effect on the employment picture in the United States. William Finlay and James E. Coverdill draw on interviews with and observations of headhunters and on analysis of headhunting training seminars, lectures, industry newsletters, and a mail survey of headhunting firms. The result is a frank and sometimes unsettling portrait of the aims, attitudes, and tactics of practitioners.

The payment of fees has shifted from candidates to employers, and recruiters now find people to fit jobs rather than the other way around. Finlay and Coverdill address what they feel is a serious lack of research about the work headhunters do and how they do it. Their book is built around three major questions: What advantages do employers derive from using third-party agents to handle candidate search and recruitment? How are headhunters able to accomplish the double sale ("selling" candidates to employers and employers to candidates)? What criteria do headhunters use for selecting candidates? In the process, Finlay and Coverdill link their findings to larger issues of institutional and historical context, revealing the economic and political reasons clients use headhunters, demonstrating how headhunters manipulate clients and candidates, and assessing the impact of headhunters' actions on hiring decisions.

### **Recent Reviews:**

"They are a tribe with their own language...They are expert trappers, but also excel at fishing expeditions. And at first encounter in *Headhunters: Matchmaking in the Labor Market*, they seem friendly enough. But would you like to meet one in a dark boardroom? Yes, if William Finlay and James E. Coverdill are the guides."--Nina C. Ayoub, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, March 22, 2002

"When did recruiters become known as headhunters? That shift has occurred over the past couple of decades. . . . Finlay and Coverdill say this approach reflects today's realities."--*HR Magazine*, July 2002

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"Headhunters are playing an increasingly prominent role in the social process of matching workers to jobs. In their penetrating, multi-method case study of headhunters, William Finlay and James Coverdill begin to fill in the gaps in our knowledge of this front-line service occupation."--Arne L. Kalleberg, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

"Headhunters is a must read for anyone in the employee acquisition or talent transfusion professions. In my 40 years of participation in and publishing for the headhunter community, this is the only complete and realistic A to Z academic analysis of this previously mysterious group I've found. Headhunters can only hope it isn't read by employers or candidates."--Paul Hawkinson, Publisher , *The Fordyce Letter* ([www.fordyceletter.com](http://www.fordyceletter.com))

"In Headhunters Finlay and Coverdill tell a fine story about the complex dimensions of headhunting. Their account uncovers the hidden skills and accomplishments embedded in how headhunters manage their relationships with the managers who use headhunters to find candidates and with job candidates themselves."--Vicki Smith, University of California, Davis

**About the authors:**

William Finlay is Professor of Sociology at the University of Georgia and the author of *Work on the Waterfront: Worker Power and Technological Change in a West Coast Port*. (Temple University Press). James E. Coverdill is Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Georgia.