

Recruiting a communications expert - agencies' approaches



Martin Greig

Martin Greig has recently been appointed as Head of External Affairs at the Chartered Institute of Procurement & Supply (CIPS). In conversation with **Karen Haynes**, Martin explains how FJWilson is unlike any recruitment agency he's previously known.

Karen: Unlike a lot of interviewees for the FJWilson blog, Martin, this will be your first role at a membership organisation. I'm very interested to hear more about your background.

Martin: I came to communications from an early career in journalism, working for local and national commercial radio followed by more than ten years at BBC Radio 4. Since moving into communications I've worked in a range of sectors including technology, life sciences, financial services and tourism.

Karen: Did you come across CIPS in your work at all?

Martin: Yes, first when I covered business and economics for the Radio 4 'Today' programme. I had a lot of dealings with the CBI, Chambers of Commerce, and so on. I felt there was potential for CIPS to punch higher and get more media and legislator attention.

Karen: What do you feel this perspective and your career experience have given you?

Martin: Membership organisations need to communicate externally and with their membership - it's where marketing and comms come together. As an outsider looking in, I felt I understood how you could take a membership body in a new direction. And as someone who has led and recruited teams, I feel you don't always want someone from the same background. It's good to think slightly more laterally about what skills you need.



Karen: Tracking back now from your new role to the recruitment process itself, I understand that you've been very complimentary about your candidate experience with FJWilson?

Martin: Yes, I got in touch to give feedback - I've never done that with previous agencies! I'd simply never come across such a [candidate] experience - I was blown away at how Coby [Drage] and team went out of their way to work on my behalf. I felt they 'went into bat for me' at every step.

Agencies, in my experience, often focus too much on the number of CVs they put in front of clients. Has the agency taken the time to develop a good understanding of the employer's needs? Do they take time to understand what you, the candidate, can offer? I think that really good matching of employer and candidate can get lost when recruitment becomes so numbers driven. And this approach is reflected in agencies' communication with candidates, which can feel quite strange - one day coming across your best friend, the next presenting a brick wall.

Karen: So, firstly I'm guessing you feel FJWilson took the time to really understand the client's needs and what candidates could offer, to optimise the matching process?

Martin: Yes, and I suspect that too often agencies don't go that extra mile when matching candidates and filter out some who might be a good fit in the role even if they don't tick all the boxes on their CV. Perhaps it's a symptom of the jobs market being so busy at the moment?

I think of candidate matching as like buying a house. On paper a property might tick all your requirements, but you have to see it to find the features that tell you if the house is for you.

A good agency has an in-depth relationship with the recruiting organisation and transfers that to the candidate along the way. A good agency brings the job description to life, understand the nuances of the role and, potentially, the type of person that is going to fit.

It was clear to me that Coby understood the role, the organisation, the process, and me as an individual...and that's the chemistry you want!



I found FJWilson's approach such a refreshing change - and I wonder whether the fact that Coby is herself relatively new to the recruitment sector influences that?

Karen: I think FJWilson's values and approach stem from Fiona, FJWilson's founder, who has several decades' experience in recruitment. But absolutely, when we recruit our own staff, we don't specify sector experience. It's so valuable to have people bringing experience from different backgrounds.

Picking up on what you said about communicating with candidates, what was your experience with FJWilson?

Martin: I couldn't have felt more involved in the process, or more supported. Coby kept in constant touch. For instance, recruitment processes always take longer than the candidate would like - logistics like getting the interview panel together make that inevitable - but Coby would keep me in the picture.

And she put lots of time into making sure I was well prepared. Part of the selection process was planning a presentation - Coby chased me constantly for that! - and she supported my own research into CIPS by forwarding the right kinds of background documents. So at interview I was able to have discussions around the issues CIPS deal with and to ask informed questions.

Preparation for the interview panel also involved the wider FJWilson team in the dialogue, to make sure that all the areas we needed to be sure about were covered. At interview I didn't get any curved ball questions that often result from gaps in preparation!

Karen: Do you feel it was a benefit that FJW specialises in recruitment for the membership sector?

Martin: Not especially. I think more important is that FJWilson is good at what it's doing! It clearly has great, established relationships with clients, and for candidates, makes the process simple and straightforward, with everything clear and precise - well communicated. Being invested in the process of knowing each client and taking enough time to understand their needs is what's most important.