Human Resources, Management, and Personnel

Headhunters: Matchmaking in the Labor Market. By William Finlay and James E. Coverdill. Ithaca, N.Y.: ILR Press (an imprint of Cornell University Press), 2002. 203 pp. ISBN 0-8014-3927-2, $29.95 (cloth).

This book provides a detailed examination of contingent fee recruiters—headhunters—and the unique brokering role they play in the labor market. The book is not an overview of the contemporary staffing industry. Instead it is a careful study of the inner workings of one particular segment of the industry. *Headhunters* is written in the tradition of Chicago School occupational sociology and resembles other in-depth studies of occupations such as Becker et al.'s *Boys in White* (1961), Arlie Hochschild's *The Managed Heart* (1983), and Gary Fine's *Kitchens* (1996). In *Headhunters,* Finlay and Coverdill, drawing theoretical inspiration from symbolic interactionism and the work of Erving Goffman, offer readers a glimpse into a world of careful impression management, orchestrated interactions, mixed motives, and subtle manipulation.

Headhunters chronicles exactly what headhunters do and how they do it. The book is based on field work carried out between 1993 and 1996 on contingency headhunters in "Southern City," including semi-structured interviews with 34 headhunters and in-depth field work at five different firms. The authors gained industry knowledge by subscribing to industry newsletters, studying recruiter training materials, and participating in industry seminars and training sessions. In addition, they conducted interviews with employers about their use of external recruiters. As a result, the book is a detailed exposÈ of an elusive industry that touches many but is well understood by few.

A key theme of the book is the multiplex sales role that headhunters play. According to Finlay and Coverdill, contingent fee recruiters are simultaneously selling themselves as intermediaries, selling their candidates to hiring managers, and selling their clients—the employers—to prospective hires. Furthermore, contingent fee recruiters get paid only when a match is successfully made. According to the authors, "Successful headhunting means having the persistence to make cold call after cold call in search of a viable job order or a likely candidate, the judgment to decide which job orders and potential candidates warrant attention and which are likely to prove fruitless, and finally the patience to overcome whatever obstacles might lie in the path of a match between client and candidate" (p. 183). *Headhunters* reveals the techniques these professionals use to locate job orders and to persuade employers and job candidates to sell themselves to each other. The chapters describe hours of cold calls (with various guises and disguises); long-term cultivation of employing firms, hiring managers, and desirable candidates (with selective betrayals); and moment-by-moment management of interpersonal interactions (with differing amounts of disclosure).

The most intriguing portions of the book are those in which the authors use direct quotations to illustrate the deliberate and self-conscious strategies headhunters use to assert control over the job matching process. According to Finlay and Coverdill, a headhunter is successful if he or she can understand intimately what the hiring manager desires—in their words, the "hot buttons" and "chemistry"—and is able both to locate candidates who fit the profile and to enlist them in the process. They argue that the way headhunters overcome their structurally weak position is by actively managing the encounters with and between the parties.

The strengths of this book are its rich detail and the authors' insightful interpretations of the complex interactions among and between the actors in the job matching process. Finlay and Coverdill have broad knowledge of economic sociology and the sociology of markets. The book is theoretically informed, yet full of practical detail. While the key theoretical ideas from this research have appeared in journal articles by the authors ("The Search Game: Organizational Conflicts and the Use of Headhunters," *Sociological Quarterly,* Vol. 40, No. 1 [1999]; "Risk, Opportunism, and Structural Holes: How Headhunters Manage Clients and Earn Fees," *Work and Occupations,* Vol. 27, No. 3 [2000]), the extensive references in this work and its careful positioning within the academic literature should make it appealing to academics. The vivid description and colorful quotations should appeal to those interested in the subject.

The book's main limitation is insufficient information on how contingent fee recruiters are situated in the broader staffing industry. As the authors state, it is "hard to be precise about the percentage of positions nationwide that are filled by headhunters"; they estimate that contingency recruiters make up about 85% of all recruiters and handle 90% of all recruited place-

ments. These impressive-sounding numbers may leave readers with an exaggerated impression of contingent-fee recruiters' presence in the overall staffing industry. According to the *Staffing Industry Report* (Staffing Industry Analysts, Inc., 2001—www.staffingindustry.com), there are four broad categories of intermediaries: Temporary Help Agencies ($85.9 billion in revenues in 2000 for a 61% share of the staffing industry market); Professional Employer Associations ($37.5 billion, 27%); Place and Search ($16.1 billion, 11%); and Outplacement ($1.1 billion, 1%). Contingent fee recruiters account for approximately half of revenues within the Place and Search segment, with 28% of the revenues coming from retained search and an additional 19% from temporary-to-permanent moves. Scholars interested in the broader phenomena of labor market intermediaries will need to consult additional sources, especially David Autor's "Why Do Temporary Help Firms Provide Free General Skills Training?" on the temporary help industry (forthcoming in the *Quarterly Journal of Economics*) and Rakesh Khurana's *Searching for a Corporate Savior: The Irrational Quest for Charismatic CEOs,* on retained executive search (Princeton University Press, 2002). But *Headhunters* is a valuable contribution to our growing understanding of the modern labor market and currently the most compelling and comprehensive study of contingent fee recruiters.

M. Diane Burton
Assistant Professor of Management
MIT Sloan School of Management

The Last Good Job in America: Work and Education in the New Global Technoculture. By Stanley Aronowitz. New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001. 273 pp. ISBN 0-7425-0975-3, $27.95 (hardback).

In some other universe people who study labor movements have to read Stanley Aronowitz. They force themselves to agree or disagree with his richly elaborated normative premises and to critically analyze the novel set of causal relations he posits. In that universe it does not matter much whether the author is doing normal social science. Instead, scholars enjoy his brand of provocation.

Here and now, however, the aloofness of Aronowitz's work from contemporary social science, including industrial relations, matters. His audience consists of a small knot of radical intellectuals under siege, concentrated in New York City. We know him most recently for his 2002 bid as the Green Party's anti-candidate for New York State's governor, running on a self-consciously ironic platform.

Even those of us who do not think of Aronowitz as one of our own, however, have much to learn from books like *The Last Good Job in America.*

The book covers an astonishingly broad territory. Its title refers to Aronowitz's position as a distinguished professor of sociology and cultural studies at the City University of New York. As a public intellectual he requires freedom to structure his time however he pleases; this, however, provokes attacks from corporate interests who scheme to make the university more "useful," and from ultra-conservatives who rail against the protections that leftist intellectuals enjoy under the banner of academic freedom. Most of the book's wide-ranging essays—on the "bohemian" scene in New York City, African American identity politics, globalization, state theory, the philosophy of science, and the labor movement's past, present, and future—pointedly and sometimes gleefully challenge the status quo. Others pay tribute to intellectual giants Paolo Freire, Antonio Gramsci, Herbert Marcuse, and C. Wright Mills.

Aronowitz's pessimism is pervasive, brilliantly articulated, and anything but vague. From the first page on, he follows the tradition of critical theory, harnessing Max Weber's concept of rationalization to argue that life becomes banal as civilization undergoes technological progress. As corporations and right-wing ideologues make the university "useful," good jobs like Aronowitz's (good for the world and good for the worker) disappear. As New York becomes "developed," it no longer has a place for those bohemians whose self-directed work originally helped make it a vibrant place. As unions age, they take on the administration of the private welfare state, become agents of industrial stabilization, and cease to be public places for workers to express their concerns. The heritage of the Frankfurt School comes to life in Aronowitz's narratives.

What if we started taking this way of thinking about union decline seriously? Instead of focusing on firm strategies, sources of leverage, or the levels of bargaining, we would ask what is happening to the union hall and the social scene inhabited by union members. People who study unions would ask questions very different from those they now ask. Does the union