



THE SOURCE

"The User's Guide to Executive Search"

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You have a pressing need to enrich the ranks of your leadership team with outside talent, and you are intrigued by the use of executive search. If you are in a position to be considering the use of executive search, congratulations, you've obviously achieved success in your professional setting. However, the skills intrinsic to driving this success do not necessarily translate into your innate ability to identify, assess, and successfully attract the optimal executive talent into your ranks.

This "User Guide" is intended to help companies, executives and/or Boards evaluate the use and effective application of executive search services. Please read on for the key steps we have found most critical for success in this arena...

Why consider using executive search services?

As you have achieved tremendous success honing the professional skills critical to your role, a search professional excels at the ability to identify, assess and successfully attract optimal executive talent into your ranks. An executive search professional brings objectivity and insight into the mix, and as a result, typically brings a perspective that will enable you to identify and consider talent you might not otherwise have seen. They provide a broader sweep of the talent pool and avoid natural bias in the determination of fit. As a topical, informed 'harbinger' of the dynamics in the marketplace for talent, they understand how to attract talent and they can objectively 'sell' the opportunity without the natural suspicions that can arise in the minds of candidates listening to an executive trying to initially sell his/her own company.

Finally, a search professional helps you to think about shaping or tailoring a role to the skills of a successful, compelling candidate. Oftentimes, asking a successful person to fit into a box that has already been designed and drawn versus designing and shaping the box to take maximum advantage of the person's skills can be the difference between a successful, excited hire and a 'thanks, but no thanks' outcome.

What should you expect from a search professional?

One: Establishing Process, Roles and Expectations

The very first step of any successful search is for the search consultant to invest all of the time necessary for him/her to accurately, thoroughly, and professionally understand your company and the role in question, such that the opportunity can be genuinely, impactfully, and honestly presented to prospects. The consultant should also be disciplined about either understanding the process you've chosen or helping you to architect the process to be employed in the evaluation and selection of the final candidate.

At the start of the assignment, establish a solid understanding of the following dynamics:

- *Who will the designated point-person for the client be?*
- *Who are the critical evaluators in the decision?*
- *Who will interview candidates?*
- *How will feedback and opinions be gathered and handled?*
- *Where does the final hiring decision and authority rest?*

The search consultant must be a capable and frequent communicator to you and he/she should never fail to set the proper and honest expectations in terms of timing, candidate reactions, and necessary adjustments along the way.

You should always feel like the search consultant is driving the process, not vice-versa. The reality is clear... a search might be an important piece of your job while it is the entirety of theirs.

Two: Presentation of Candidates

The search professional's role is to continually find ways to convince you to act in your own best interests, namely to not look for reasons to extend the process or artificially narrow the possibilities, rather look for ways to make an intelligent hire and get on with the business of growing your company.

Instead of presenting a virtual parade of qualified candidates in front of you, expect them to exercise judgment and to demonstrate an appreciation for the value of everyone's time by narrowing the choices and presenting the very best candidates to you for a decision.

They should also push the envelope and question norms regarding the circumstances around a key hire. For example, if you express there is nobody worth pursuing amongst your competitors, don't be surprised to hear a response such as "If they aren't any good, why do you pay close attention to them as competitors? They must be doing something right." It is the search professional's duty to leave no stone unturned in the pursuit of the ideal candidate.

Three: Insight into the 'Human' Dimensions of Candidates

You should expect the consultant to articulate the competencies, the expectations, and the assessment of 'fit' for each candidate you choose to interview. In fact, the candidate summaries reflecting these aspects of every candidate you will meet should be sufficiently comprehensive to the extent you actually feel like you already know them well before you even meet them.

You should expect your consultant to understand the motivations, nuances and impediments associated with every candidate relating to the ultimate probability of successfully being able to hire them. Nothing is more frustrating than investing a lot of time and emotional energy in an attractive candidate, only to find they can't be dislodged from their extended family back home.

Four: Honest Negotiation

Finally, the search consultant should insist on acting as the honest broker between you and the

candidate during offer negotiations. Allowing you to negotiate directly with the candidate runs the considerable risk of creating lasting tension and possible animosity between you and the candidate before he/she even shows up for work.

What constitutes a successful outcome?

First and foremost, you should be able to almost immediately acclaim the successful candidate as a real difference maker in your midst. Every expectation you've held for the hire should be met and then some. It won't be perfect, but the search consultant should have been able to characterize the key legitimate expectations you should hold for the placement and also to predict where the challenges may surface.

It's not enough for the search consultant to say, "The search went well," it also has to "add value" to the enterprise. To quote a client of mine from the past, "Wow, that search was incredibly expensive and...it was worth every single penny." This type of outcome means you, as the client, can legitimately view the search fees and expenses as investment in the business from which you'll realize an attractive return, not just as a necessary operating expense to keep the doors open and to potentially yield an uncertain impact somewhere down the road.

Good search 'partnerships' between clients and consultants inevitably pay mutual dividends in the future. The search consultant receives positive referrals and future business by way of the client served well. The client receives not only an enrichment to the executive ranks in the company, but will be top of mind for future considerations the search consultant might handle, i.e. Board assignments, etc. Obviously, this does not imply search consultants try to recruit clients away from their firms, but as the world turns and companies/careers evolve, there are often chances for the search professional to help.

In a nutshell, there you have the "User's Guide to Executive Search" plus a few helpful hints. To humbly acknowledge and borrow a phrase from The Home Depot, a very successful organization where user's guides are plentiful, when it comes to employing executive search services, "You can do it, We (TalentQuest) can help."

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