



Choosing an Executive Search Firm

Choosing the right Executive Search firm is crucial in order to successfully attract and retain exceptional talent. Many Hiring Managers have mistaken ideas about what they should expect from a search firm and how the relationship must proceed in order to maximize results. Often, client companies view search firms as glorified personnel agencies who are to be tolerated but never appreciated. In fact, a professional Executive Search firm bears little or no resemblance to personnel agencies. The obvious role of a recruiter is to introduce talent to their clients. But when the partnership is defined one-dimensionally, it would be like comparing grabbing a Big Mac at a drive through window to eating a gourmet meal at a fine dining establishment. Both fill you up, but the similarity ends there. I used the word "partnership" earlier. Recruiters are not employees or gofers hired to submit resumes. They are professionals engaged to partner on many levels over a very long time with their clients. The benefits of partnering with a professional and APPROPRIATE firm are immeasurable. Let me enumerate.

Industry knowledge, historical perspective, and current data are integral to a successful search. Therefore, it is more effective to select a firm that specializes in your particular industry. When a search firm focuses all of their energies in your niche, they provide scope and depth that generic firms lack. For example, it is naive to assume that everything on a resume is accurate or that everyone tells the truth when interviewing. If a recruiter has been following the careers of these people over a long period of time, they can quickly recognize inflation or misrepresentation of information. Because they spend all day every day speaking with people at all levels in your industry, they hear the "stories" from many angles and often understand the reality of a given situation more accurately. Because recruiters know the dynamics of your competitors, they are able to pinpoint which companies they should hone in on in order to find talent that will experience a smooth transition when joining your firm. You will you have succeeded in depleting your competitor of a star performer, while simultaneously strengthening your team. A specialized recruiter also knows the language of your industry and can understand a resume in its proper perspective. So, when looking to begin a relationship with an Executive Search firm, try to find one who's expertise is in your market.

When you begin working with an Executive Search firm, it is imperative that you start out expecting to have a very close, interactive, and on-going relationship with that firm. There are many reasons why this is important. First, once a firm knows you, your company, the corporate culture, personalities, and expectations (as well as the flaws), that make your company unique, they are successively more and more adept at presenting appropriate candidates. If you shot gun assignments, then no one firm ever gets to develop their understanding of the many facets of your company and will not value the assignment as they would if they knew you were embarking on a committed long term relationship. Once a recruiter has worked with you, the number of people they present on each successive assignment will probably decrease, but the "hits" will significantly increase in a much shorter period of time. Additionally, your industry will come to associate the search firm with your company, and when interested talent desire introductions, they will contact the search firm, resulting in streamlined access to your industry's best talent.

The recruiter you select should provide you with far more than resumes. First, they should carefully and extensively screen potential candidates to learn all of the important information that isn't in a resume. When they determine that a candidate is appropriate, and only then, they will divulge your company name and provide details about the opportunity. A resume should never be sent without the candidate's express permission once they have knowledge of exactly who will be receiving it. When the recruiter submits the resume, it must be followed up AS SOON AS POSSIBLE with a one-on-one conversation with the Hiring Manager. In this conversation, the recruiter should provide details about the candidate's personality, short and long term goals, cultural preferences, and other subjective but critically important information. Along with that, they should provide you with accurate information on the candidate's production, earnings, territory, core competencies, etc. going back at least 5 years. Since the recruiter spent considerable time speaking with and questioning the candidate, they have developed a keen insight into potential pit-falls or superlative characteristics. This inside scoop is invaluable when prioritizing candidates. Finally, the recruiter must never forget the purpose they serve; it is the long-term growth and advancement of

their client, and is NEVER the placement in and of itself. Therefore, when discussing candidates, recruiters should point out weaknesses or possible areas of concern, so that the client gets a "heads up" to prepare for their interview.

Another crucial service provided by recruiters is perspective and advise on a myriad of issues. For example, they should provide client companies with ongoing information about how the industry perceives the company and what areas they need to address. Compensation packages can be assessed for competitiveness. Territory alignments and market strategies can be modified based on the broad perspective recruiters gain from talking with so many companies on a continual basis.

The relationship between Hiring Manager and recruiter should be one of two partners working together towards a common goal. Mutual respect and cooperation will produce greater understanding. It is most important that the recruiter be viewed as an important and integral tool in the business of talent acquisition. When they call, they should be given priority. Once they have initiated a process with a candidate, it is vitally important to maintain momentum while the energy level is elevated. Recruiters can and should provide clients with so very much more than pieces of paper. Smart companies take advantage of the vast pool of knowledge and experience a successful niche-focused recruiter provides. After all, business, at its most elemental level, is always about PEOPLE!