

If You Want Your Search To Succeed, Engage the Hiring Manager

By Alan Davis

We've all been in a situation where the hiring manager seemingly buys into a rigorous, structured and transparent search process. Yet when the time comes to get feedback on a target company list, a target candidate list, a batch of shortlisted resumes and candidate interviews – and it is like pulling teeth.

So what happens to these seemingly committed hiring managers to make them switch from being engaged to disengaged? More important, how can we get them back on track?

The answer lies in clearly stating the accountabilities at stake.

First, we must establish right up front that the hiring manager is the actual client and the success or failure of the mandate is his or hers to bear. HR and the search consultant play a supporting role, but it is the hiring manager who makes the key decisions at every stage of the process.

Second, we have to make sure HR understands that its role is crucial. The HR people have easier access to the hiring manager than the external vendor and also have a responsibility to do everything possible to ensure a successful search.

The role of a hiring manager, especially at the executive level, is arduous and increasingly complex. Demands on the hiring manager's time are enormous and we need to remember a seeming contradiction: hiring is not the typical hiring manager's primary concern!

The key to a successful search, then, lies in the relationship between the hiring manager, HR and the search consultant. It is the consultant who must establish a common understanding of the respective roles and who must keep the search on track, in spite of external forces which may even be hidden from everyone involved.

The importance of relationships was brought home to me at the recent Cornerstone conference in Oxford, England. Our central European partners explained how, in their market, the search consultants are selected by an apparently automated process



without any input from the hiring manager. Worse still, access to the hiring manager is denied and candidates also are submitted as part of an automated process.

I ask myself, how can you automate a process which revolves around human interaction and interpersonal relationships between the hiring manager, the search consultant, the HR department and, last but not least of course, the candidate?

Hiring is, by its very nature, a relationship-driven process, so taking the relationships out of the process makes no sense to me whatsoever. Evaluating human attributes and capabilities cannot be subjected to a transaction-oriented process; the process has to be people-oriented if it is to be successful.

There's another consideration here. Searching to find the most appropriate candidates to fill complex positions is difficult; if it wasn't difficult, the recruiting industry would be a lot smaller if, in fact, it existed.

Given this degree of difficulty, any way to simplify or maximize the recruiting process should be welcomed. One such way is to create a forum that will facilitate communication between all of the stakeholders and which also provides a mechanism to put the search back on track if necessary.

The experience and expertise of the client-facing consultant is to me one of the key differentiators between successful searches and those which fail. It is the relationship building abilities of the search consultant which is the underlying factor in creating a sustainable and successful search environment.

The role of HR can make a huge difference in the hiring process. When HR is engaged as a partner in the process, it can add huge value both as a contributor of individual expertise and as a facilitator between the various parties. Without this level of intervention by HR, the search can degenerate into a transaction-driven process which will invariably lead to failure.

In conclusion, if you want your searches to go well, engage the stakeholders, get their commitment to the project upfront and identify any specific role that each has to play – and do this before the search starts.

As search consultants, we really shouldn't have to hound our clients to get the ultimate result – the successful hire. But if that's what it takes to succeed, I suggest you do it in a courteous and professional manner.

In the end, the client will thank you for it.



The Author:

Alan Davis is founder and President of Alan Davis & Associates Inc., a specialized recruiting practice based in Quebec, Canada. He has 29 years experience in recruiting and has managed many recruiting campaigns, both in Canada and overseas. Alan was the Program Manager of the 1992 Canadian Astronaut Recruitment Campaign. His company provides specialized services in executive search, strategic recruitment & selection, succession management, and interview training. Alan is a regular conference speaker and a frequently published author on recruiting and selection topics.

Hudson, QC: 450-458-3535

www.alandavis.com



