

Good Executive Recruiting – The Basics Still Apply

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In this age of AI, the use of tools such as AI-driven talent search and assessment platforms are pervasive. However, when it comes to excellence in Executive Search, the human touch remains indispensable. While certain tools have had technological updates, the behavioral and analytical skills needed to turn human interaction into successful recruitment remain essential.

What Makes a Successful Recruiter?

While there is no single right answer to this question, character traits such as “positivity”, “compassion”, “grit”, and “detail-oriented” come to mind. And while every recruiter is unique, there are some shared key components to effective executive recruiting:

- *Ask the Right Questions* – It’s imperative to know both your clients and candidates well. For clients, you must understand their industry, company, business goals, company mission, culture, and talent needs. For candidates, in addition to what’s on their resume, you must assess them as people and professionals, and find out **why** they are searching for a new job. To do both well, you must ask the right questions.
- *Be a Good Listener* – Just as important as asking the questions, is listening to the answers. You must hear the nuances of what is being expressed, ask follow-up questions which reveal the true nature of the individual. Listen more than you talk – use short pauses to create space in the conversation allowing the other person to give more thoughtful responses.
- *Become a Trusted Advisor* – Be responsive to clients and candidates – reach out to them more than they reach out to you. When they do reach out, respond quickly. Do your homework so you can demonstrate in-depth, relevant knowledge. Add value – help clients better understand their own talent needs; help candidates identify what they want in their careers and help them get there. Take the long term perspective, develop relationships over time.
- *Be a Salesperson* – At the end of the day, you are selling. You have to sell clients on your abilities, services, expertise. You have to sell candidates on your ability to help them build their careers. You have to sell clients on the best candidates, and the candidates on the best offers. You have to be able to turn “no” into “yes.” Make cold calls with a plan that makes all calls compelling. Above all, stay in touch.

Prepping for Positive Interviews

The executive search professional is the bridge between an organization with a talent need and the individual with the capacity to fulfill it. Using the dating paradigm, the recruiter is a matchmaker who must know all about the individuals, their lives and their families, and is seeking to make the “perfect match.” Just like prepping for a first date, so must the recruiter prepare candidates for interviews with potential employers. Aligning skillsets and experiences with company needs and goals is fundamental. But crucial is the human connection between client and candidate during an interview.

Of course, candidates must have necessary information about the position, company, management team, business goals, etc. Yet equally important, they should be prepared to frame a positive conversation. According to Meredith Ritter, Senior Vice President for Intellectual Property, Howard-Sloan Legal Search, “Some candidates, when describing why they are looking for another job opportunity, will jump to the negative and complain about what is missing from their current situation. It is imperative to reframe that perspective, to communicate what they are looking for as the next step in their professional growth.”

AI vs. the Human Touch

AI-powered sourcing has become the norm in executive recruiting, saving time and resources to find and match candidates to opportunities based on skills and experiences. Efficiencies and scale lead to the creation of extensive and strong talent databases. AI assessment tools are also valuable in determining cultural fit and reducing potential biases. However, the human touch remains integral to success. Clients and candidates alike value the personal relationship.

Authentic, empathic human interaction builds trust, ensuring that all feel valued and understood. Human EQ (emotional quotient) goes deeper than IQ (intellectual quotient). Often throughout the process, it’s the emotions beneath the facts that matter most. Mitch Berger, CEO, Howard-Sloan Search, and Managing Partner, IMSA Search Global Partners USA, makes the point: “Placing C-Suite executives and senior managers is a long-term proposition. The clients are looking for leaders that will grow their business over time; they are willing to invest significantly in order to achieve this goal. Candidates invest their time, energy, and emotions in building their futures. As the stewards of these investments, we work hard to build trust through personal interactions, nurturing relationships, and developing deep understanding of all involved.”

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