KEYS TO SUCCESSFUL EXECUTIVE LEVEL TALENT ACQUISITION

Step 1: Getting on the Same Page

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One of the preeminent challenges for a business in any industry is building the right team. As Jim Collins states in Good to Great, "you must get the right people on the bus" in order to build a great company. The best ideas, most innovative processes, and ground-breaking products will not make a ripple in the marketplace if the right people aren't in the right roles. Given this realization, what is the most effective way to ***approach*** talent acquisition? A common refrain is that everyone involved in the hiring process must be "on the same page". But what does this really mean? What tactical and strategic steps are involved? Who should be included in the process?

Many organizations either skip over this critical first step entirely or, at most, give it minor consideration. They jump right to generating a requisition and then reaching out to candidates through internal or external recruiters. Especially for leadership roles, this is a "ready, fire, aim scenario" where the recruitment process and the candidate are set-up to fail (or at least limp across the finish line). Yes, of course organizations have thought of stipulating what the right technical competencies are for this position. They know what types of companies the person should have worked for and how many years of experience s/he should have. These are important block and tackle factors to consider. However, more robust dialogue must exist to evaluate what the key challenges are that the new hire will be called upon to address. The new hire's mandate must be consistently agreed upon by the hiring team. It is also critical to have an understanding of the resources (budgetary as well as human) that will be made available. This information not only helps during interviews, it also enables the recruiter to engage candidates more thoroughly during the recruitment process and also measure interested parties against an accurate profile.

In order to "get on the same page", there are two discussions that should occur. The first can be guided by common sense questions that can largely be predetermined. The fact that these questions can be reused for just about any position does not make them any less important than questions that are custom tailored to a particular role. Following are some suggestions to get a hiring team started. Remember, it is imperative to consistently communicate the role, position, duties, and responsibilities as well as goals and objectives to all that participate in this process.

- Why are we recruiting for this position? Is it newly created, recently vacated, is there a history of underperformance?
- Are we looking to grow and if so, how? Do strategic plans include acquisitions in the future? Is the company in a turnaround or a realignment situation?
- What are the primary objectives for this person?
- What obstacles to success might exist internally to the organization?
- What key initiatives will the new hire lead? Is a strategy in place? Will s/he develop the plan?

- Who will this person manage? Is the organizational chart clear? Are reporting roles, moving up and down the organizational chart, clearly defined?
- What is the caliber of the team that the new hire is inheriting and what are the related challenges based on team makeup?
- Is the company looking for someone that managed/performed just like the previous person in this role? If not, what changes are needed?

The second discussion surrounds the types of behaviors that the candidate should exhibit if they are to be successful in their new position. This conversation can be more challenging to get started as it involves the underlying beliefs and predispositions of each member of the hiring team. As a result, assessments can be very valuable in order to guide this second discussion. An example serves well to bring things into focus.

The following is a common scenario: One person on the hiring team believes that the newly hired executive will need to excel at creating a vision and getting employees on-board with a strategy. This person is looking for a candidate that takes a long-range, broad approach to problem solving; an individual who is an analysis-driven planner. Another member of the hiring team may not think a visionary is what the company needs. Instead, they place a high priority on finding a candidate that is much more focused on achieving results, an individual who is dominant and assertive and who thrives on taking charge[i]. These are two very different focuses. Once they are brought to light, a meaningful dialogue can result and consensus on a behavioral profile can be reached.

There are great assessment tools available that can be leveraged to look deeply into what each person on the hiring team believes to be important behavioral characteristics. If the hiring team pays attention to these characteristics during the hiring process, the team and the selected candidate will be set-up for success. These tools will also highlight where leaders converge and diverge from one another regarding key functions and supporting behaviors.

As demonstrated in the example, assessments can be immensely beneficial when approaching talent acquisition as they can address complex questions by breaking them down into bite-sized, rational, and quantifiable data points that will lead to effective decisions.

With these preparatory discussions completed, the hiring team can adequately prepare the recruiter to be successful and, come interview time, the team can effectively position the role to candidates. It must be remembered that interviewing is both a vetting **and** a selling process. The best scenario a hiring company can have is a handful of strong candidates who are each excited about the opportunity. For this to happen, the team has to dismiss the idea that each candidate comes in feeling honored to be interviewing with the company. Each member of the interview team must get the candidates excited about joining the company while, at the same time, determining if the candidate is a good fit for the company.

In order to sell effectively, interviewers must be playing the same tune. All too frequently candidates leave interviews confused and frustrated because they were presented with divergent and conflicting information regarding the company and position. When recruiting gainfully employed, A-players, a company can't afford to re-sell candidates on the opportunity. Once a candidate has a negative interviewing experience it is highly unlikely that their enthusiasm will be rekindled. In all likelihood they will pull out of the process.

Losing great candidates due to a few short hours of dysfunctional interviews is costly when considering all the work that goes into bringing them to the table. Typically months of research, hundreds of outbound calls, screenings and interviews were conducted. Additionally, depending on the nature of the position, it may be highly difficult to refill the pipeline of recruits. The law of diminishing returns is at play here. Another expense to factor in is that a key role in the organizational chart remains vacant.

In sum, the benefit of a thorough kick-off process really goes far beyond making a good hire. The recruitment process can actually function as a way to both bring in exceptionally aligned talent and to force meaningful dialogue to occur within a leadership team. At Robinson Resource Group, our consultants are adept at helping clients through the entire hiring process. From the ever-important, early stage hiring team dialogues, through the recruiting and vetting process and on-boarding, we make sure that every client "gets the right people on the bus".

About the Author:
Andy is an Executive Vice President, Search Consultant at Robinson Resource Group. Andy entered the search business as an associate and worked his way up to his current role as EVP, Search Consultant. Andy has an intimate knowledge of every facet of the search process enabling him to successfully fill even the most challenging assignments. In addition to his search experience, he has extensive hands-on experience in market positioning, growth strategy development and execution, and general operations from his years in business.

From an industry standpoint, Andy has broad and deep expertise in the engineering and construction field. He also has comprehensive experience in information security, diversified industrial/manufacturing, recreational products, hospitality & entertainment, and professional services. Search assignments have included most functions including human resources, sales/business development, marketing, public relations, project/program management, procurement, finance, general management, and C-suite.

Andy is a member of Society of American Military Engineers (SAME) where he has served as the post membership chair. Additionally, he is a member of Vistage, HRMAC, and The Executives' Club of Chicago (ECC).

[i] Management Research Group®. "Leadership Effectiveness Analysis™ Set Definitions". 2012. Accessed 10/23/2013.