

Step 2: Target List & Name Generation

Author: Andrew Wolkstein

This article is a follow-up to “*Keys To Successful Executive Level Talent Acquisition: Step 1 Getting on the Same Page*” [click here](#). Once the hiring team has a clear and consistent understanding of the nature of the role to be filled and the technical and behavioral characteristics of the ideal candidate, the talent acquisition leaders can develop a recruiting plan. These recruiting experts may be internal employees or representatives from an outside firm. Regardless of whether you leverage internal or external resources, the earlier recruiters are involved in the process, the better. As a result of their cumulative experience in recruiting key leaders, they can provide a valuable assessment of the competitive landscape related to the role you are looking to fill. An additional benefit of having the recruiter involved in early-stage conversations is that s/he will have a deeper understanding of the critical characteristics that the successful candidate must possess. It is important to note that recruiters are exponentially more effective at “selling” opportunities to passive candidates when they have a thorough contextual understanding of the role they are working to fill. Please see *Step 1* in this series for specific examples of information that will be invaluable. Unfortunately, it is a common occurrence where recruiters enter the market with only a rudimentary understanding of the opportunity that they are representing.

After the team has established the ideal candidate prototype, the recruiter should develop a list of organizations where this person is likely to be working today. In order to find the best candidates, and not simply those that are the best available candidates, an organization simply cannot rely on job postings. While social media and digitally enhanced employer branding initiatives enable organizations to have a well-planned and highly strategic face in the marketplace, they still only speak to active candidates. We frequently hear that companies are motivated to find “passive” candidates through their postings and social media campaigns. However, these candidates are not, by the nature of how they are finding these companies, passive. Even if they are not highly motivated to leave a current position, they are still actively surveying the employment marketplace. Truly passive candidates are not on job boards, are not “liking” company employment pages on Facebook, or following your company on Twitter. They are gainfully employed, keeping their heads down, and doing great work. In short, they **ARE** the people you want to be speaking to.

Not to be misunderstood, there definitely are professionals in transition who are A-players who happened to get caught up in circumstances beyond their control and thus are unemployed. Recruiters need to speak with these individuals. Still, the 80/20 rule applies and the vast majority of exceptional candidates for your role are currently working and they’re not looking for new opportunities.

What are some of the questions to consider when developing the target list? First, and perhaps most obvious, is geography. Is this a local, regional, national or international search? What companies have a presence in this geographic area? Is everything in place with regards to paid relocation if this is applicable? In addition to geography, it is important to consider if the most likely candidates are currently working at companies which are smaller, similar, or larger than yours. How are you determining size; employee numbers, revenue? Something to contemplate is the fact that an individual with larger company experience may have grown accustomed to having more resources at their disposal than you will be able to provide. This could be a

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challenge. On the other hand, they may have experience developing and/or implementing effective processes and procedures which would be beneficial for a business that is growing in size and complexity. Do you want someone at a direct competitor? Someone coming from this camp may not be a “mold breaker” in that they are likely to be steeped in your industry’s traditional methodologies. Conversely, people from your industry may bring extremely helpful industry comprehension and ideas about how other competitors have excelled in your market. They are also likely to be able to hit the ground running and may require less time and energy from their new peer group and manager. If there are other industries that employ the types of individual that you want to hire, what are they? This might be a great opportunity to break the mold and bring in fresh approaches to the challenges your company is facing. Do you need someone from a product or services industry or does it not matter? Filling a vital role in your organization is a great opportunity for progress. Ideally you will make a strategic hire with long term organizational goals in mind. Defining the types of companies that currently employ these types of people will greatly increase the likelihood of hiring such an individual.

Now it’s time for name generation. You know where the prospects work; now you must find out exactly who they are. There are many tools for recruiters to use to effectively develop a solid database of potential candidates. Hopefully, you have captured information from previous searches and you have a foundation laid by populating the database with the fruits of previous labor. Leveraging social media tools, especially LinkedIn, but also Facebook and other platforms that bridge peoples personal and professional lives in a public format is critical. You need to join vertical trade organizations and comb their journals, leverage membership directories, and you must know how to “Google hack”. This involves using advanced search methods (on Google or other search engines) in order to find helpful documents such as conference attendee lists, presenter profiles, contact information etc. The Internet is an amazing aggregator of information in the public domain. The best recruiters strategically navigate the web to uncover both great candidates and networking sources.

As experience has shown, the greatest return comes from directly reaching out to potential candidates. Even if they are not ultimately interested, they are often the most able to refer people who possess similar skills and backgrounds as themselves. Secondly, it is definitely useful to reach out to well thought-out sources. These are people with whom you may or may not already have a relationship but who hold a position which would indicate that they would be able to provide industry intelligence or specific referrals. An example may be the President of a relevant association that hosts events that would be of interest to your target market or professors and/or authors whose research gives them unique insights into industry trend setters.

A final note on name generation, **think quality not quantity**. For most executive level positions, a database of 150 people should be sufficient provided that the appropriate level of scrutiny has been applied. It is noteworthy that if the recruiter is not given clear direction and/or is not involved in the early stage conversations regarding the specifics of the position, their database can easily spiral to double or triple this number. This results in wasted time, effort, and energy for many people on the team. It leads to more

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meetings to refine what you are looking for, more resumes to go over together before the recruiter can effectively and confidently determine a candidates suitability, more initial interviews of unqualified candidates...you get the picture.

Incorporating these two steps of effective recruitment will position you for success in the search process. This is just the beginning. The meat of the search, effectively reaching out to potential candidates, getting them interested in the opportunity, and assessing their potential fit is still to come. In the next article, “*Step 3: Going to Market*”, we will discuss how to make your outbound recruiting activities efficient, effective, and rewarding for your team.

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).