

## **WHITE PAPER: Finding Top Talent Takes You from Survive Mode to Thrive Mode**

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*Recruiting the best takes time, patience and homework – and is not a task you should delegate entirely to others. As the economy continues to rebound, decisions about how to recruit new leaders can help put smart companies ahead of the pack.*

The good news: with recession fears subsiding and your business outlook brightening, you're now ready to rebuild or revitalize your leadership team with some fresh blood. The not-so-good news: finding the best person to fill a key leadership position is never an easy task.

A wrong hiring decision can have far-reaching impact on you, your leadership team, your employees and your shareholders. A good hire, on the other hand, could help propel your company from your current survive mode and into a thrive mode.

It's simply a matter of finding the right person for the right seat on the bus. But *you* are the one who needs to be in the driver's seat – to make sure you are seeking, interviewing and hiring the leaders you need. Here's how:

### **First determine “what,” then “who.”**

Yes, you're very busy, and so is the rest of your team. No doubt, you're tempted to dust off an old job description and try to find, as quickly as possible, a person who fits that description.

Resist the temptation.

Take time upfront to define what you require in a leadership team member, both in the near term and in the future. This is not a task to be delegated to your leadership team or your Human Resources department, although both should play roles in the search and selection process.

Take a deep look. What are *your* expectations for this team member? What must be accomplished in *your* new, post-recession environment? What's *your* vision for the company -- and what role do *you* see this person playing in *your* vision?

If you're leading a small company, you may need this individual to multi-task, to be responsible for financials, technology, and operations. If you're the CEO of a larger company, the position may be more segmented and a thought leader would be more appropriate.

Now that you know "what" you're looking for, you need to consider the "who" – that is, what kind of person can fill this role. Do you want someone who has managed for growth? Led a turnaround? Successfully managed an acquisition? Developed new products? Closed down a business? Think of the kinds of skills, experience and qualities that would grab your attention as you review a candidate's resume.

**Lead – don't delegate -- the search.**

You need to actively participate in the search. One of the biggest mistakes a CEO can make is staying out of the search process until the final interview.

There are two methodologies for finding good candidates for an open position: the traditional route of an external recruiting firm that works with your company's employment team and the relatively new route of social and professional networking. Both paths have their

advantages and disadvantages; regardless of which path you choose (and you could use both), you should be an active participant.

You can work closely with your HR/employment team to ensure that you will be presented with the best candidates for interviewing. Offer to meet with the external recruiter to give your views on the type of candidates you want to see. You're paying the recruiter to find you viable candidates, not to make the hiring decision for you.

Just as you use your social and professional contacts to stay abreast of what's happening in your industry, you can tap into these same contacts to find appealing candidates for your open leadership position. The recession has created an abundance of available talent looking for the next opportunity, but don't assume it's a buyer's market. Good leaders are hard to find, no matter the economic environment.

### **Interviewing: the art of the question.**

While there's no need for you to interview each potential candidate (that you can leave to a recruiter or your own team, once you have provided a clear picture of what you want), you should be heavily involved in interviews by the time the search is narrowed to a handful.

Just as the candidate needs to go into interview mode, you should as well. If you have succeeded in interesting top talent in a position, you're probably not the only one; it's likely you're competing against other companies in the industry. You need to sell yourself as well as the company you lead.

To determine whether the candidate is the right "who" for the position, you need to prepare a solid series of questions that help you uncover the candidate's character. Interviewing

is the art of the question. It's counter-productive to dust off the same questions that candidates have heard time and again (what's your greatest accomplishment? what's your biggest flaw? what can you bring to the job?) for which the candidate has undoubtedly rehearsed a nicely prepared speech. Prior to your interviews, develop new questions or refresh old questions to help you bring out a candidate's character.

While you use the formal part of the interview to test knowledge, business skills, and industry savvy, don't discount how much you can learn during the informal parts of the interview. The informal portion helps screen candidates, above all, for cultural fit. Take the candidate to lunch or dinner with another member of your team and observe how he/she interacts with you, the colleague and even the wait staff.

If you wish, ask a trusted (external) adviser to interview the top candidates for another take on the cultural/chemistry fit. While it is your decision about hiring, a second opinion can help.

### **Your New Hire Should Help You Thrive, Not Just Survive**

As the economic picture brightens, you must anticipate what you need to stay ahead of the curve to achieve a competitive advantage. A new, post-recession business environment calls for new thinking, which includes the right leadership team. You must actively participate in the selection of new executives you are expecting to help accomplish your plan. That includes:

- Defining the position (prioritizing the skills, knowledge, experience, and qualities you need).
- Participating in the search process (through a recruiter and/or through social/professional networking)

- Interviewing the top candidates with questions that help you dig beneath the surface.

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