

Added Value to Enhance the Search Process

By Bruce Dingman

An outside consultant can bring more value to the Selection Team as they work through the search process than they might initially realize. While finding candidates is important, making the right hiring decision should be process oriented rather than being focused primarily on locating candidates. For example:

- **Professional interviewing and reference checking skills:** An outside consultant is professionally trained in this area, a benefit sometimes not residing among those involved in the selection process. Also, when an outside consultant is used, the members of the Selection Team feel freer to thoroughly question the comprehensiveness of the scrutiny or the validity of conclusions that came out of the interviews. When such investigations have been done by someone on the selection team, probing may be limited or may undermine the cohesiveness of the Selection Team.
- **Building a spirit of support in the organization for the selection process:** Oftentimes the search process can increase the spirit of unity for the organization, rather than the reverse. Using an outside consultant to meet with the appropriate constituencies (in a campus setting this may include representatives of the faculty, administration, students, community leaders, major donors, and trustees) to ask what they would like to see in the selected candidate, while inviting their suggestions of names makes them feel part of the selection process. The hiring choice remains with the decision makers, but a more receptive attitude is developed because the constituencies feel they have shaped the type of person who is ultimately selected. Without such an inclusive process some constituencies are apt to feel a remote, autocratic hierarchy controls their destiny.
- **Handling internal candidates:** An outside consultant, when asking members of the senior management team for suggestions of possible candidates, can determine if they have an interest in the position. If the consultant feels they are not a fit then the person can blame the consultant, but they won't feel that leadership has ignored or misunderstood their abilities. If an outside consultant is not used, then two negative reactions could happen: either the person is angry that they were not considered, or if considered but rejected they usually feel leadership does not adequately value them. All too often useful members of management are needlessly lost by organizations for either of these two instances.
- **Increased objectivity:** Being professionally trained to understand organizational cultures, personalities, and management strengths and weaknesses, an outside

consultant can oftentimes more objectively and accurately understand an organization than can the clients themselves. It is not uncommon for organizational leaders to be overly optimistic about their company or management team. It is important that whoever is being hired has an accurate impression of the organization, defusing the risk of disillusionment. The more accurately both the employer and the employee understand each other going into the relationship, the greater the chances of a good, long-term fit.

- **Sufficient resources:** Our resources are committed to handling the search selection process. That is all we do. On the other hand, if the organization's staff is assigned to handle the details associated with coordinating the search, it can place an inordinate burden on already busy people. Also, in-house staff may inappropriately have access to confidential information.
- **Provide more candidates:** In several ways, an outside consultant may produce a greater number of good candidates. For example, by their nature, some potential candidates don't network. There might be potential candidates at secular organizations not known within the organization's usual relationships. Some potential candidates have to be specifically approached and even encouraged to realize this is an opportunity worth considering. Outside consultants are usually more thorough in finding and proactive in asking potential candidates to consider if the position is for them than the customary selection team members.
- **Turning down unqualified candidates:** It is easier for an outside consultant to tactfully turn down unqualified candidates. This puts less strain on the relationships the candidate may have with someone on the Selection Team or others of prominence within influential circles. This also allows the Selection Team to focus on the qualifications of candidates and less on influential relationships.
- **Keeping the search process on schedule:** Taking too much time or too little can affect the success of the effort. The search firm has the responsibility to have a panel of candidate's ready for presentation by an approximate date. Their expertise in finding enough candidates, nurturing the relationship with the candidates to keep their interest alive, and then sequencing the recruiter's interviews, reference checking, background checks, and candidate profile report preparation so things happen on time and with the expected results are a mark of the recruiter's professionalism. The recruiter expects to be held accountable for meeting these goals. If done in-house this may be the first time a Selection Team chairperson has had such a task, or worked with the staff person handling the details.
- **Identifying and quantifying shortcomings of candidates:** all candidates have shortcomings and outside consults can make sure the Selection Team sees and knows the depth of any weaknesses the candidates may have. When Selection Teams manage the selection process themselves there may be a reticence to talk about the shortcomings of a finalist for fear that might undermine their candidacy. By evaluating



shortcomings during the selection process there is a greatly decreased chance that there will be surprises later on about the character, personality, values, or management style.

- **Minimizing risk to candidates:** All too often, unsuccessful candidates' reputations are marred by the selection process. If someone was considered but not selected in more than one search, they might become thought of as "always a bridesmaid, but never a bride". In our assignments there is a proactive, purposeful effort to diplomatically handle the turndowns, check references with extreme care, and to limit who has access to information so confidentiality is closely maintained.
- **Dealing with tough turndowns:** If a potential candidate says, "God has told me I am the person," it can be spiritually indelicate for the committee to disagree. However, due to our significant experience in situations just like this, we have developed finesse for handling such situations.

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