

The Added Value of a Search Firm

By Bruce Dingman

An external search consultant will bring value to the selection team as they work through the search process. Making the right hiring decision should be process oriented rather than being focused primarily on locating candidates. Here is what your professional and experienced search consultant offers:

- **Professional interviewing and reference checking skills:** An outside consultant is professionally trained in this area—they know how to ask the right questions and hear the subtle nuances to get a full and accurate picture. Also, when an outside consultant is used, the members of the selection team feel freer to thoroughly question the comprehensiveness of the consultant's conclusions. . Sometimes vetting by the selection team 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 will increase the spirit of unity for the organization. Using an outside consultant to meet with the appropriate constituencies (i.e. executive members, senior leaders, faculty, administration, students, community leaders, major donors, and trustees) to ask what they would like to see in the selected candidate and inviting their suggestions/input allows the them to part of the selection process and valued. The hiring choice remains with the decision makers, but a more receptive attitude is developed because the constituencies feel that their input helped bring the selected candidate. then a sense that a top-down hierarchy controls their destiny.
- **Managing internal candidates:** An outside consultant, when asking members of the senior management team for suggestions including any internal candidates. If the consultant feels they are not a fit, then the leadership can place the responsibility on the consultant the internal candidate won't feel that leadership has ignored or misunderstood their abilities. There could be a couple of undesired outcomes of an outside consultant is not used: either the internal candidate is angry that they were not considered, or if considered but rejected may feel leadership does not adequately value them.
- **Increased objectivity:** Your search consultant is professionally trained to understand organizational cultures, personalities, and management strengths and weaknesses. An outside consultant can objectively and accurately understand an organization, sometimes more than the client. Sometimes 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, so there are no surprises. 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.
- **Enough 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:** An outside consultant will produce a greater number of qualified candidates. By their nature, some potential candidates don't network and/or may not even be looking for a change. There might be potential candidates at secular organizations not known within the organization's usual

relationships. Some potential candidates must be specifically approached and even encouraged to realize this is an opportunity worth considering. Outside consultants will be intentionally thorough in finding and asking potential candidates to consider the opportunity.

- **Turning down unqualified candidates:** An outside consultant knows how 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 within their circles. Allowing them the ability to focus on the qualifications of candidates and protecting influential relationships.
- **Keeping the search process on schedule:** Taking too much or too little time can affect the success of the search. The search firm has the responsibility to have a pool of candidate's ready for presentation by an approximate predetermined date. The consultant's expertise in finding candidates, nurturing the relationship 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.
- **Identifying the shortcomings of candidates:** No candidate meets all the desired qualifications and an outside consultant will 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 these deficiencies during the selection process there is a greatly decreases there will be surprises about their character, personality, values, or style.
- **Minimizing risk to candidates:** An outside consultant will be sure to manage the search so that candidates who are not selected maintain the reputation and confidentiality. 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.