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GOING ON A MANHUNT

Hiring a search consultant to look for a company director or vice-president? Here's how to gauge if the consultant will deliver.

Recruiting the right management is crucial to the survival of your organization. If you are thinking of using a search consultant, don't base your decision of fees alone, as services from search consultants differ substantially?

When discussing with potential headhunters, watch out for four things they say. These reflect on how they do business:

1. "I have a dozen assignments on hand so I can't guarantee you will get a lot of service and attention from me.

Many search firms are under pressure to deliver revenue and profitability while containing costs especially for the bigger firms.

These firms may have downsized recently and consultants may have extra workload, comprising assignments assumed from outgoing consultants. Their ability to serve you and their level of responsiveness is dependent on their current workload, so ask what this is.

HR professionals familiar with competency-based interviews should apply this in the selection of search firms. For example, ask them which their most difficult searches were, what difficulties they encountered, how they went about it and how long they took. This will give you an idea of how focused they are.

2. “I’m the senior consultant who is pitching for this search but my colleague, a junior consultant, is the one who will handle it.”

It is common for a firm, when invited for a pitch, to send their best and most articulate consultant to meet the client and to win the assignment. Ask if this eloquent consultant will be handling your search assignment or will a junior consultant be interviewing your potential vice-president or director.

3. “We cannot present to you candidates from companies A, B, C because A, B and C are your clients, so they are ‘off-limits’ to you”

All professional search firms have some sort of “off-limits” policy where they do not head-hunt from their clients, or head-hunt candidates placed by them. It is in your interest to ask who their “off-limit” clients are.

If there are five consultants in the search team working in the area associated with your search, and assuming each placed 20 candidates, you have 100 candidates “off-limits” to you.

In this respect, the smaller and mid-sized recruiting firms have the advantage as they have fewer clients, hence fewer “off-limits”.

4. “We will place candidates from our client organizations, as well as candidates previously placed by us, as long as they are the ones who came to us, so we don’t have any “off-limits’.”

Selection rather than search firms practice this. Be aware that because there isn’t a strict “off-limits” policy, employees from your organization can be taken and placed elsewhere even if you are a client. This may also apply to candidates placed in your organization by the search consultant.

Saving a few thousand dollars off a search appears like a lot in the short-term.

However, getting the right vice-president or director for your company has a major impact on your business, which could come to million of dollars. Asking the vital questions can better focus your search.

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