

Why you need a Headhunter

It takes more than just a recruitment advert to attract top talent to your company. You may need the help of a headhunter.

Few people can say “headhunter” without feeling mixed emotions. To the company officials who have just lost one of their key executives, a headhunter is literally someone who be-heads, leaving their company bereft of its top achievers. Yet a headhunter is not without admiration even in this situation. There is bound to be a feeling of creeping admiration for the headhunter’s ability to find and dislodge these achievers.

On the other hand, the headhunter’s client may well look to him or her as his lifeline to grow. And certainly to the headhunted individual, it is reassuring, and maybe even flattering, to see his efforts being recognised and actually offering him a path to greater prospects.

As with most clichés, “headhunting” is a tired, overused term of an expedient dismissal of a service not clearly defined nor understood. The process to locate that studied match between the employer and his executive, commonly manifested in the “advertisement-response interview hire” process, has simply taken a new look with headhunting. It is for this reason that “executive search” is a more accurate description of what is in a hunt.

Executive search is an exact search, encompassing a careful process whereby recruitment is preceded by pro-active consultation of the client for a detailed candidate profile, a thorough research of the industry to identify the candidate, and innovative negotiation between client and candidate once a match is found.

Growing enterprises and family conglomerates competing with multi national corporations for the same talent base can immediately benefit from such a service. They battle with the prejudice linking them to high responsibility, low autonomy and a perceived lack of professionalism, career development and name recognition in the industry.

In order for these enterprises to carve a niche in business, and more so as they regionalise, there is a pressing need to literally human re-source. That means combing the market for executives with management expertise combined with entrepreneurial drive to help them grow.

Enter the executive search consultant. He is both trained and committed to understanding the various needs of his clients. Don't be surprised at his pertinent questions, for he only seeks clarification of your corporate vision, mission, culture and ethos. This ensures that a valued candidate, whose personality, aspirations and qualifications fit in with your growing enterprise, can be found.

The alternative is, of course, to blitz the market and hope for the right person to respond. And yet high-achieving candidates are often too busy performing in their job to respond to such opportunities, or to have the chance to rethink their prejudices of growing enterprises.

Of course, one could also rely on personal contacts and referrals but once these are exhausted. what next? Your time is better spent running your business instead.

The value of a good search consultant may not be immediately appreciated by growing enterprises, but he promises to seek out and present your enterprise professionally to the right person with the potential to bring much value to the business. In the long run, the investment will prove to be well worth it.

Which of course presents the issue of how to appoint and maximise the services of a search consultant.

First and foremost, that consultant must appreciate your needs as a business owner. Preferably he should himself be the owner of his business. And if his consultancy is part of an international organisation, he has that added edge of being internationally connected while remaining locally relevant.

Leave your search in the hands of a consultant who is prepared to go that extra mile in his professional endeavour. The consultant with integrity is one will advise if a candidate does not exist and go on to provide tangible guidelines to restructure the enterprise as well as organising both the short and long-term remuneration and accountability programmes. This will not only attract but retain the appropriate candidate.

Such a search consultant will also qualify your needs and probe your motivation. He will even coach you on interviewing a candidate to gain maximum understanding of that candidate in order to determine a profitable fit. It is clear to see how the race need not belong to the consultant with the longest list of candidates but rather a more targeted one, since your time is precious, limited and should be jealously guarded.

In return, it is wise to be honest with your consultant. Verify his industry experience and expertise. If you wish, and once you have settled that, brief him thoroughly on your business and its culture. Tell him the strengths and limitations of the organisation. Be precise and sincere, after all, he is there to help you. Finally, trust him to do his job well.

Executive search may well be that fine-tuned, methodical service of the future, but it remains at heart a people business. It promises to be personable and professional but does not pretend to be magical. Things may not always go as planned. The business environment is a dynamic one and clients and candidates do change their minds.

But one of the most exciting possibilities for an apt consultant is that he should help a growing enterprise identify working partners instead of just employees. Growing enterprises need a breed of executive who is a hybrid of a corporate manager and an entrepreneur. These people do exist but it does take time and effort to find them as their skills are rare and much sought after.

If the right consultant is appointed, he can identify and attract these people to his client's organisation, thereby increasing its potential for continued growth. After all, for the candidate it may pay to be a big fish in a growing pond than one of many fishes in a big pond.