



## A New Perspective on Gaining Value from Your Executive Search Firm

**BY: BRIAN CLARKE, MANAGING PARTNER,  
KENSINGTON INTERNATIONAL**

As a senior leader, you have a clear understanding of what it takes to manage your business effectively, but perhaps no single issue is more important than making sure you have the right team members with the right skills and abilities in the trenches alongside of you. Whether you are trying to identify the specific skills and abilities needed in your existing team or you have advanced the effort to the point that you have identified the need to go outside based upon a talent gap, the key is knowing when outside help is necessary to improve either. And the insights are equally valuable if you have ever found yourself or expect to be on the other side of working with an Executive Search firm.

A senior leader can easily become familiar with the external reputation of the firm but conversely, the search engagement is a process that can appear to be intangible and in many ways difficult to assess prior to engaging and ultimately completing an assignment. In many instances, search is the most viable means available through which the organization can validate the need to go outside, determine the extent to which the skills and characteristics you are looking in the “perfect candidate” are available in the market and then finally, leading efforts to secure the highest caliber candidate for your particular need.

So, when assessing a firm and consultant, how can you make sure your organization is selecting the right firm and ultimately getting the value you are paying for?

### **ALLOWING THE SEARCH FIRM TO ADD EVEN MORE VALUE – LEADERSHIP MODEL, ASSESSMENT AND SCORECARDS**

Relationships with search firms by nature and in many instances can be highly transactional however, the very nature of being called search consultants, infers both a skill set and approach that can and should include more than just securing talent.

You can be assured that a firm’s specialties and/or a consultant’s knowledge of a particular job type or industry can help you in identifying candidates quickly. A very solid generalist search firm/consultant with a highly developed research and knowledge management function may also allow you access to a wider range of targeted industries, companies and candidates. And, an innovative consultant should also be in a position to suggest a variety of “go to market” recruiting strategies to gather company targets and candidates.

But what can also be of great value is a far more consultative process, typically spearheaded by the search firm, to determining the right leadership behaviors for your organization, the cultural fit.



Executive search firms seeking to take their game to a new level are using assessment tools and processes to identify current and desired states in terms of leadership behaviors and then using those behaviors to drive their selection process. The resulting “scorecard” that combines leadership behaviors, work experience, technical skills, knowledge and demonstrated abilities can have a significant impact on the success of the hire.

## **THE ABC'S OF SEARCH - BLOCKING & TACKLING STILL REQUIRED FOR THE SUCCESS OF AN ASSIGNMENT**

Executive Search is still an art form versus an exact science. As such, all engagements still require transparency, communication and proactive approaches to increase the likelihood of the engagement's success – at least in a timely manner.

Throughout the process and certainly at agreed upon points in the search, the consultant needs to provide formal feedback on progress. Facts and data are critical and it is helpful for both parties to provide formal reports on candidate conversations and the extent to which the firm has hit the proposed target companies, positions and people within each, particularly if the number of candidates generated is below expectations.

This is perhaps the single most important element of a sound working relationship between the consultant and you is a clear element of trust.

## **ACT AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE ON THE CANDIDATE POOL**

While it still may not feel like the economy is overheating, the demand for best athletes is

exceptionally high. If a candidate is active to any degree at all, they most likely are looking at multiple opportunities. Be as deliberate as you can be to make sure you don't lose candidates that expressed initial interest in your role

## **ASK ABOUT ONBOARDING**

Without an effective assimilation plan, many new leaders can struggle with adjusting to their new role, company and culture. If the firm is assessing candidates on the way in (and we know that no one candidate is perfect), “gaps and blind spots” can be identified and to a great extent mitigated through development plans, coaching and engaging with key stakeholders in a relatively short period of time.

## **SUMMARY**

As a senior leader, securing and retaining dynamic and talented leadership should your top or one of your top priorities. The rewards for executing or the penalties for not executing on this strategy can be extremely impactful – to the upside or downside. Partnering effectively with the right Executive Search firm can pay great dividends. And, if you happen to be on the other side of the desk, as a candidate, you owe it to yourself to understand how that firm is partnering with the organization to help ensure the success of the landed candidate.