

As part of an occasional series, we publish 'Searching Matters'. This edition offers a formula for conducting your own search assignment. All the pit-falls are spelled-out to enable you to Do-It-Yourself.

## Searching Matters

### A DIY guide to search

The old adage, "people are your most important asset" is wrong. The *right* people are your most important asset.

Are you recruiting your fair share of the right people to fill those key positions? Your business has to adapt and improve but without the right people you have a built-in handicap. The most successful businesses continue to pull away from the rest and it's their people that make the difference.

You know better than anyone else the position to be filled and the qualities of someone who can be expected to succeed. So why not do it yourself. Here's how to do it.

### Your initial thinking: a quality check

Check your recruitment strategy and process because quality has to come first. Don't fall at the first hurdle: the best available person that can be found to meet your initial thinking may not be good enough. You need to keep options open. Like any project, you must manage the risks that can lead to delay, to an unsuccessful appointment, to wasted business opportunities and to wasted time.

### Your early decisions

You'll need to write down a description of the job and the personal qualities needed. There are usually choices as to what you need to look for when making senior appointments, especially when people are to work together in a team. And as team working increases in importance, you might want to put some personal qualities such as communication, stamina, adaptability and persuasiveness ahead of the more familiar functional competences.

### Trade-offs

So, when your vacancy is particularly critical or the market for people is particularly tight, you will need to build some trade-offs into the yardsticks you use.

You need to look in three places to find the trade-offs:

- in the way in which you define the job
- in where you choose to look for candidates and
- in the strengths and preferences of candidates.

You may know of someone who you think could be suitable or decide to look for candidates through acquaintances or agency CVs. Finding good candidates by this route rarely produces the best and you are necessarily limiting the field. Also, strong candidates are not often found on databases because people of greater ability tend not to seek advancement in this way and when they do appear, it's not for long. A lot of valuable time can be wasted and the wrong compromises made if your project is tackled in this way.

### Stay in control

You will be wiser to advertise, conduct a search, or both. Advertising and search will give you the opportunity to address candidates who are new to the market, to assess the market and to attract the attention of people who had not hitherto considered the kind of opportunity you are offering.

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And it should be recognised that with today's levels of search activity, many people do not feel the need to comb the job ads.

### **Heffalump traps**

A search programme can be quite involved. You will need to identify people employed in the industry/location/occupation that you decide and names will need to be gleaned from careful research. When you talk to potential candidates, some will lead you to others but you must be wary of the reputation that you can get for yourself in your industry.

### **Getting the right people interested**

When searching you must continually take the opportunity to sell yourself and above all to listen to what people have to say. Plan the conversation, talk to them, find out their real interests and tell them about your opportunity. Let them tell you what they have done and how they did it. You can then get to recognise for yourself the stage that they have reached and whether they would fit into your team. (We call this 'Mutuality'.) And remember, amongst these people is likely to be a candidate who you will want to join you. You will need to commit a good deal of unsocial time to these conversations; usually over the telephone.

### **Candidates introduce new options**

When you hear of potential candidates, you will need to be thinking about those trade-offs. The short-list will present you with some opportunities that you had not considered in your initial thinking. The ideas now passing through your mind might include the following.

*"This candidate does not have all the attributes that we are seeking but has others that we did not initially require. It presents us with fresh options that we must consider."*

Or

*"This candidate has spent little time in our industry but their experience benchmarks strongly with our emergent technologies/processes/markets. It really does offer us advantages that we could not have anticipated and I can see that they would contribute well as a team member."*

Here you must handle the trade-offs with care. Questions that will need to be considered here may include

- Can you and should you change the role in the light of a candidate's own attributes and preferences?
- Is a case being made for the team to share responsibilities differently?
- Is it appropriate for your business (and for a candidate) to ask them to join you from a different industry?

### **An agreement to join**

The offer may be made and accepted in a simple transaction. When that happens it is a tribute to the thought and effort you have put into the process. Some further persuasion and negotiation is usually necessary and this can be a very critical time as parties are testing one another for temperament as well as conducting the negotiation of a package. Other short list candidates will need to be kept in the running and you will need to maintain a dialogue with them to retain their continuing confidence in you, the process and the opportunity.

### **Making an effective entry**

You have invited someone to take up key responsibilities in your business. There is a huge amount to be learned and they will not be aware of most of it. New recruits don't know what they don't know. You will have to invest a good deal of time and effort planning briefings and training to give the recruit the best possible start. Any new recruit feels themselves to be in the deep-end and their own thinking and effort alone cannot be expected to be achieve the induction needed. Competence in this work takes training, experience and practice. PMSelect has the capability already in place to do this all for you.

So, if you decide that your skills are better dedicated to doing your business, then perhaps you should leave this kind of thing to us - doing our business!