



MARCH 2008 - LEADERSHIP LETTER #25

Thoughts on Searches for Senior Executives

Hello Clients, Colleagues, and Friends ...

In the last year or so, several clients ... consulting engineering firms and churches ... have been engaged in searches for key personnel. They've asked me to help in mostly different ways.

Well, their searches have caused me to reflect on critical success factors, failures and learnings. That's the topic for this letter.

THE critical success factor, I believe, is such careful interviewing of top candidates that you **know** who they are and what they'll do.

Great interviewers have a saying: "The surest guide to what a person **will** do is what they **have** done."

I hope you enjoy my "**Thoughts on Searches for Senior Executives.**" As always, you can also access this and all past leadership letters at our web site (www.henseyassociates.com).

All the best,

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THOUGHTS ON SEARCHES FOR SENIOR EXECUTIVES

For the past 33 years of our practice, we've assisted many boards, CEO's, and executive teams with the process of their searches for senior executives, including CEO's. We've helped them develop the process, identify attributes needed, find sources of candidates, and finally with evaluation of top candidates.

Sometimes these searches were internal, sometimes external, sometimes both. Surprisingly, sometimes they began as external searches but refocused internally when available external candidates were disappointing. In my limited experience, I can't recall having the reverse happen ... where the search began internally, but refocused externally because of a dearth of good internal candidates.

For internal searches, sometimes the selected internal candidate failed to deliver the needed leadership. But in those cases, another internal candidate was almost always chosen ... later.

For external searches, sometimes the selected external candidate failed to deliver the needed leadership. In some of those cases, the firm looked externally again, with more success, using lessons learned the first time. And in some other cases, that painful experience caused them to look again, internally, with more success than they initially expected.

Here are some of my own learnings based on my clients' experiences in finding key senior executives, including CEO's, regional leaders, branch managers, external board members, and others:

- [1] It's much easier to develop the criteria you want in that leader than it is to determine if the candidates will actually meet your criteria!
- [2] It's much more likely to find the essential "fit" with your culture, with inside candidates.
- [3] Even with lots of thorough interviews of outside candidates, it's easy to miss serious problem areas.
- [4] Inside candidates are often more severely evaluated, simply because more is known about them.
- [5] In a number of cases, a belief that we must go "outside" for this leader later resulted in a shift toward inside candidates, and in my small sample, all were successful.
- [6] As is true of most recruiting efforts, there is a higher degree of success in finding good external candidates by way of networking with those who know your firm (including your own staff) ... than via recruiters or search firms.
- [7] There is huge variability in the quality and integrity of executive recruiters and search firms; find and use the best if you need that kind of help.
- [8] Regardless of whether the successful candidate comes from inside or outside, he/she will need 6-12 months time in which to develop an understanding of the new position and begin to make appropriate changes and decisions.
- [9] Regardless of whether the successful candidate comes from inside or outside, there will likely be some "fallout," i.e. people they don't want on their team, or prefer to have in a different "seat."
- [10] Our experience suggests that a new leader will not be viewed as fully empowered until he/she makes some tough decisions; the easiest decisions for most people to see are those involving personnel changes.

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