STRANBERG
RESOURCE GROUP

HOW TO IMPROVE RETAINED SEARCH PERFORMANCE – Part I

Retained search firms are used by just about every leading company in every sector as a way to find and hire top grade talent. While this is true, hiring managers and senior executives frequently tell us they've been disappointed with their experiences using retained search. Improved performance is in everyone's best interest. What we all want are successful projects conducted by consultants that have our best interests in mind and in whom we trust with building our most important asset: our Human Capital. There are a few simple guidelines that hiring organizations should keep in mind when hiring and working with a search firm.

Retain the right consultant. First: always remember that you are not hiring a firm you are hiring a consultant – don't get lost in the marketing ploys. Savvy hiring managers know that the individual conducting the search, not the firm conducting the search, makes all the difference. The size of the firm is becoming more irrelevant each day. Even when working with the largest firms, it is essential that you find the best consultant for *you* and *your company.* Every search consultant has access to organizations and information channels that enable them to find outstanding individuals. The key differentiators are the ability to work constructively with you and your team; the willingness to invest the time to truly learn the unique qualities of your company; and, then to create a compelling message to the market – the targeted executives. Add to these, the intense desire to succeed: the drive, passion, and tenacity to take the project to a successful conclusion and you have a good match with your search consultant.

Plan it well and they will come…. Work with your search consultant to create a dynamic approach including a detailed job description and specific target organizations of interest. Don't just hand over your internal document. Use that as the starting point and then have the search consultant meet with each of the key stakeholders or influencers involved with the project. If at all possible, have these scoping discussions in person at your site. After the meetings, ask the consultant to provide a written list of the key requirements (academic, years of experience, breadth of experience) and detail on the competencies required for success in the role. Suggest key targets for the search and then ask the consultant to build a deeper list based on their intelligence and your input.

Candidate Information. Ask for the candidate's original resume supplemented by a written summary profile prepared by the search firm. The personal resume is an unfiltered example of the candidate's presentation style – another view on how the candidate thinks. The search firm's commentary on a candidate should focus on the back-story: detail on major accomplishments, personal background, management style, leadership attributes, decision-making, etc. Tell the search firm that you expect to their write-up to include detail on failures and weaknesses as well as on accomplishments.

Reporting. The key to any search is information and information is useless without a good communications plan. Expect a lot of detail from your search consultant – where they're looking, what they're hearing, candidates who declined and why they did so. Be clear with what you want to know and set up a reporting schedule.   As much as you want and need information, avoid asking for reports for reporting sake – if it isn't mission critical leave it off the want list. You don't want your search partner burdened with unnecessary reporting that takes time away from the essence of the project – sourcing, screening, assessing.

Communicating is a two-way street: be available as much as possible to answer questions or to take quick action on a special request such as making a call to a candidate of interest. Provide good feedback to the consultant – let him know what's going well or poorly. The no-surprises rule applies to both sides. This is a key concept for the efficiency and overall success of any search.

Single-Piece Flow (sort of)…. If at all possible, stay away from the older batch method in which the search consultant qualifies a group of executive candidates before presenting them to the hiring team. This method usually takes at least three to four

STRANBERG
RESOURCE GROUP

weeks before the first batch is presented. In the battle for talent this is a big mistake: the best candidates are not going to wait around for the search firm's process. Ask the search firm to report weekly on candidates that match the qualifications and for whom interviews should be scheduled. Push your hiring team to follow suit – get the best candidates to the table as soon as possible. Urgency is inherent to this approach and helps everyone to stay focused.

Benchmark Candidate. Close calibration between candidates and position requirements is tough to achieve without real information. A good way to ensure better matches is to insist on a candidate for interview early in the process – within the first two weeks. This gives you the chance to work with the consultant to refine the search process if necessary while at the same time ensuring rapid acceleration of the project. We've found benchmarking in this manner to be especially helpful in first-time relationships – ensures that everyone is hearing each other correctly and sets the groundwork for success.

Outliers. These are the candidates that fall just short or just beyond the scope of the position in either experience or compensation. Ask the search consultant to provide the resumes and notes on the best two or three on both sides. On one hand, this informs the search by providing some useful points as you progress through the process. On the other hand, these individuals may have attributes that would be useful in other parts of your organization.

These are just a few simple steps your organization can take when working with a search consultant to ensure a successful relationship and a success search process.