

CEO RECRUITMENT IN A VIRTUAL AGE

It's a new age today – of social distancing and digital connections.

Even so, we've just helped several associations recruit their new CEOs, using virtual interviews in place of the usual face-to-face interactions. Along the way, we gained a few insights into CEO recruitment in a virtual age – lessons you might find of value in adapting to a changing world of recruitment and selection.

Lesson #1

Trust matters. More than ever.

Trust has always been a cornerstone of effective search. Members of the search committee must trust each other – and the search process. Having some extra conversations with the committee members to assure the right level of trust of each other and especially the technology in a virtual interview process proved to be very important.

Lesson #2

Practice makes perfect.

It sounds like a cliché. But in an era in which not all search committee members may be technologically savvy, it's time and effort very well invested. Practicing with technology increases confidence and comfort levels with the virtual process. It helps establish protocols for the interview moderator and participants. Just as important, it helps everyone get comfortable with the process and allows more personal connection between the committee members and those being interviewed.

Lesson #3

Be ready to go the extra mile.

Absent the chance to meet a candidate personally, some search committee members saw value in adding an extra interview. That additional chance to interact not only

provided a valuable opportunity to ask follow-up questions, to probe more deeply on certain matters, or to look deeper for the all-important element of cultural fit. It also raised the committee's comfort level with the virtual process.

Lesson #4

Consider engaging the Board.

In each of the CEO searches, the Board trusted the search committee. But bringing the Board into an extra conversation about process with the search committee before the final round of interviews cemented that trust. Giving directors the chance to weigh into the process and hear about the committee's positive experience with a virtual first round of interviews made them even more comfortable in granting their approval to the final candidate recommended by the search committee.

Lesson #5

References rule. Always.

Search committees and boards look closely at references. That's not news to anyone in search. But we observed that committee members and directors in a virtual situation looked especially closely at reference data. They scrutinized who those references were, and what they had to say. They dug deep to assess just how much each candidate's past performance had impacted organizational performance.

Lesson #6

Don't forget social media.

Search committees expect a thorough examination of what a candidate says – and what is said about the candidate – in a growing universe of communication media, from news reports to professional media forums. A virtual interview process only serves as a reminder to everybody involved that candidates can have a cyber history – a history easily accessed in this computer age, which may invite questions, clarifications and further detail about something said well outside the interview process.

And the Big Lesson to Remember

Match substance with style.

In these successful searches, committee members tended to focus on two common and critical questions:

- How will you help us through this time?
- What do you see as our business model for the future?

Search committees wanted thoughtful, substantive answers to both. But in each instance, they also showed that the virtual age marries style with substance as never before. Committee members paid as much attention to how things were said as they did to what was said.

- They looked for people with **presence** – people who exuded confidence, people comfortable with who they are and what they can do.
- They appreciated **genuineness** and **authenticity** – people who didn't try to play a role, people who allow their natural personality to come through.
- They valued people who **took the opportunity seriously**. They embraced people who indicated genuine interest in the position, and respect for everyone involved in the process. Whether an in-person or virtual interview, search committee members wanted to see people who were truly eager for the opportunity.

In the end, the virtual interview process proved to be more than simply an acceptable alternative to the in-person interview. It showed that this new dimension of the recruitment process may become an increasingly common part of the search professional's tool kit.

If you would like to dive deeper into some of the leadership insights we've gained from a decade of delivering consistently superior results in executive search, just let us know. We're eager to help.

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