

Recruiting Healthcare Leaders: How to Manage Your Search Firm Partnership to Maximize Success

Strong Demand for Healthcare Leaders Persists

By Joyce Tucker, Executive Vice President / Managing Principal

Rapidly changing healthcare industry dynamics have created greater urgency when it comes to having the right leadership in place. The sheer volume of recruiting activity, not to mention competition for highly desirable executives, has spurred many health organizations to invest in in-house talent acquisition departments. The goal, of course, is to find the most effective and cost-efficient way to secure often scarce skills, such as patient outcome, population health, health data analytics and revenue cycle management leadership.

Acquiring and developing leadership talent is a hefty charge and like most strategic functions, such as Finance, IT, and Compliance, there is a time and a place for leveraging a range of internal and external resources. As an executive search consultant who has held clinical and administrative leadership roles, I have always found the most successful outcomes result from collaborative, transparent and trust-based working relationships between internal and external resources.

How to Recognize When Hiring a Search Firm is a Wise Investment

Not all leadership searches are appropriate to outsource; those that require in - depth knowledge of an internal process, or those that are recruited for by an internal search team with some regularity – thereby generating valuable intellectual capital within the organization – may be better kept in-house. Conversely, however, there are scenarios in which the return-on-investment proposition of engaging an independent search firm is highest. Those include:

1. Hard-to-Fill Positions.

Certain positions will be difficult to fill, often due to the scarcity of the desired skill set. These searches require an extraordinary amount of original research to uncover potential candidates and can be very time-consuming for internal resources. A search consultant who is conducting talent outreach on a daily basis often has greater access to more difficult-to-reach, passive leadership candidates. By using an outside search firm, a healthcare organization can benefit not only from a robust research team, but also from the personal relationships a consultant with experience in the specialty area can offer.

2. Leadership Positions that Garner High Volumes of Interest.

High-demand positions, such as CEO and COO, often generate a high volume of responses, requiring abundant resources to adequately manage them. An organization may receive hundreds of resumes that then need to be promptly and carefully evaluated, to identify only the most highly qualified applicants. Managing communications with all candidates – including those who do not make the short list – is an important consideration as well. Healthcare is, ultimately, a small field and the perception among healthcare leaders who encounter your organization as a potential employer has a significant ripple effect. Responding to all candidates in a professional and timely manner regarding their compatibility with the position is a powerful way to maintain a strong employer brand.

3. Newly Created or Significantly Evolved Leadership Positions.

When an organization wants to create a new role, it can often benefit from a trusted advisor who can draw upon experience with other health care organizations to help define the role and establish clear expectations, both internally and externally. Similarly, a leadership vacancy following a longtime incumbent is another example of when an objective search firm can help identify and gain consensus for adding more contemporary competencies to the position's requirements

4. Management of Internal Candidates.

Hiring for executive-level positions can become highly politicized, especially when internal candidates are interested in the position in addition to external talent. In these situations, engaging an objective, third-party search firm to manage the process can be invaluable – not only to minimize disruption among existing leadership but also to help increase the probability of success for the person who fills the role.

Holistic Resource Strategies Maximize Success

The best strategy for optimal management of an organization's executive search needs is to proactively evaluate its internal expertise and bandwidth, along with the unique dynamics of each position. Taking this holistic and proactive approach, together with developing collaborative and transparent working relationships with qualified search partners, will help an organization engage the dynamic leadership talent they seek in today's competitive healthcare market.

About the Author



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As a seasoned clinical and operational healthcare executive for more than 30 years, Joyce is responsible for senior-level healthcare search services and consultation. She works in collaboration with healthcare boards and senior executives at healthcare organizations nationwide to acquire senior talent to meet their business objectives.

During her esteemed career, Joyce has been responsible for healthcare administration and management, human resources, budgeting, purchasing, marketing, strategic planning and process improvements. She draws upon this diverse background to help healthcare organizations successfully define leadership roles and acquire senior talent with the right technical and cultural skills to successfully lead in today's changing healthcare market.

Best Practices for Getting the Most Out of Your External Search Partner

To maximize the search experience and its outcomes, an organization must create an environment in which its internal leaders and its search partners feel part of the same team, working towards a common goal. Some advice on ways to achieve this type of alignment:

1. Act Early

This is especially true when working with a limited pool of qualified candidates. When organizations wait until a position has been unsuccessfully advertised for six months before outsourcing to a search firm, job openings can become "stale," causing candidates to question why the position has been open so long, thereby creating an additional obstacle. It is also important to assess hiring managers' expectations of timing, so that you can proactively anticipate when to outsource a search and manage expectations.

2. Create a Search Algorithm

One that takes into consideration which types and how many searches an organization can handle internally, thereby flagging which searches should be outsourced and when. A standard decision-making system, as opposed to an ad hoc approach, creates greater visibility and consistent search management parameters organization-wide.

3. Manage with Transparency

Internal Talent Acquisition partners can play a pivotal role in how effectively a search firm performs. Helping external resources to understand the organizational culture and navigate political landmines can help create a timelier and more successful search process.

4. Communicate Regularly and Frequently

One of the most common disadvantages for an external search partner is not having ready access to internal decisions makers in order to gather candidate feedback and schedule next steps in a timely fashion. Internal partners can have a tremendous impact on reducing the length of position vacancies by helping to manage internal availability and resolve bottlenecks. They should also consider meeting every couple of weeks to understand the progress and challenges of the search, such as scarcity issues, location or compensation challenges, and to collaborate on possible solutions.