PART-1

OVERCOMING NONPROFIT BOARDS UNIQUE CHALLENGES

Don't Lose a Great Executive Candidate for the Wrong Reason

BattaliaWinston

By Dale Winston

RECRUITING SENIOR EXECUTIVES FOR A NONPROFIT ORGANIZATION CAN BE DAUNTING. MEMBERS OF THE BOARD AND EXECUTIVES WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION INVARIABLY HAVE DIFFERING PERCEPTIONS OF HOW THE NOT-FOR-PROFIT SHOULD BE RUN AND THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE POSITION. AND, AS HUMAN BEINGS BRINGING UNIQUE EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES, THEY WILL HAVE DIFFERENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE TYPE OF PERSON WHO SHOULD BE HIRED.

At Battalia Winston, we have helped nonprofit boards with executive hiring through a facilitation process that happens before any candidates are seen. We have found that the process leads to greater agreement and quicker decision making, increasing the odds that the eventual hire will be an excellent fit.

When the facilitation process is overseen by an objective third-party at the outset of the recruiting effort, variations in personal styles and opinions can be mitigated in an environment where each member of the team — which includes key stakeholders across the board and senior management — feels they are being heard. The process encourages internal alignment for the recruitment effort and ensures that the candidates are being assessed equally and from the same perspective. It also results in consistent messaging to prospective candidates and guidelines for the person who is eventually hired.

> ***To begin the process, decision makers are brought together to discuss their thoughts around position responsibilities, candidate qualifications and first-year deliverables. The facilitator makes sure everyone shares their thoughts and comments. Group members then score the elements under consideration on a scale of 0 to 3. As the discussion moves on, priorities rise to the top and outlier issues go to the side.***
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> ***We find that search committee members are usually in agreement about most things, while their disagreements are on minor issues. What the process does is to allow all members to have a voice and put their opinions out on the table, and that transparency creates more trust among them.***

Here's an example: I worked with one group that was tasked with finding a new CEO to run an organization made up of two newly merged nonprofits. Members of the search committee

were equally distributed between the two predecessor organizations, resulting in slightly more tension than a typical search committee would have.

During the facilitation process, members identified the most important qualifications for the prospective CEO and determined considerations that would not be deal breakers. But when the search was nearly complete and ready to go to offer,a member of the board who had a great deal of status — someone with a well-recognized name — objected to the candidate, citing a missing criterion.

In an ordinary situation, this person's voice would likely sway the whole group, and the search would have started over. For this organization, a protracted search would have been particularly draining at a time when the board and the staff needed to move beyond the uncertainty of the merger.

Fortunately, because we had gone through the facilitation process beforehand, I was able to point out that the committee had decided the consideration the board member objected to was not important. The objection was dropped, and the candidate was subsequently hired.

A few months later, I got a call from the president of the merged organization's board. The prestigious board member had just walked into the president's office and complimented the CEO Battalia Winston had placed at the organization. The board member was pleased that the unimportant factor had not derailed the hire.

> ***Here's how we think about it: In any search at the executive level, there's a limited universe of people who have the right experience and track record and who are interested in making a move.***
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> ***The best candidate is never the perfect candidate. However, when stakeholders go through a moderated process to prioritize the factors that will determine the hiring decision, the best candidate will not be eliminated for a reason that is ultimately inconsequential.***

This is the first in a series of articles focused on how nonprofit boards can overcome the unique challenges that come with their roles.

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Partner profile

Dale Winston is Chairwoman and CEO of Battalia Winston, one of the largest woman-owned executive search firms in the United States. Dale was also formerly a member of Amrop's Global Governing Board, and served as its Vice Chairwoman-Americas

Dale has deep experience in working with not-for-profit organizations. Her clients include foundations, medical centers, social services organizations, and International NGO's, where she focuses principally on senior level recruitment.

She has been featured in many media outlets including the Wall Street Journal, CBS News, CNN, CNBC and U.S. News and World Report. In 2008, Business Week recognized Dale as one of the Top 100 Most Influential Headhunters in the World.

A graduate of Finch College with a B.A. in Psychology, Dale is active within her community. She is a member of the Urology Research Program Advisory Board of N.Y.U. School of Medicine and has served as a Board member and Chair of the Communications Committee of The Association of Executive Search Consultants. In 2003, Dale received the Association's prestigious Gardner W. Heidrick Award, which was established to recognize professionals in the executive search industry for their outstanding contributions to the profession.

Dale is married and has two sons. She enjoys golf and travel.

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