



Recruiting Executives: McHugh's Tips and Suggestions

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WHY SMART EXECUTIVE RECRUITING IS IMPORTANT

One of the responsibilities of leaders is hiring the best managerial talent who will contribute to the success of the enterprise. There is much riding on recruiting decisions at all levels but most particularly at senior and executive level positions.

In commercial publishing and associations, smart, capable and ambitious people are absolute requisites for success. Publishing is a business based on people, process, and creativity. Recruiting is about hiring the best talent available. Great people drive superior performance.

Many folks cut corners when it comes to executive recruiting, as recruiting done correctly is labor-intensive and demands that you make critical judgments about people. It's hard work. You constantly must ask: "Will this candidate fit in our company's culture and succeed in this position?" Therefore, it is imperative that you take your time in the recruiting process to avoid costly mistakes.

CONSEQUENCES OF POOR EXECUTIVE RECRUITING

Your organization will pay a big price when you hire executives who do not succeed. Here are the reasons.

Your company will lose opportunities without competent leadership. If your new executive hire is not the right person, then there will be a net loss to the organization. It comes back to successful organizations being people-driven. For example, you could lose partnership opportunities, product development momentum, experience lack of budget adherence, and forego new market development.

Your credibility suffers from poor hiring decisions. If you are the hiring executive who made a bad decision, then you look bad because you are paid to make judgments that benefit the company. Hiring people who fail in their positions always hurts you and your organization.

A poor-fitting hire leverages his/her damage throughout the organization. If you have hired a poor leader, chances are that person will damage the performance of his/her department. The peers of the wrong hire will be affected. Most likely your workload will increase because you will have to cover for your subordinate's poor performance.

Your frustration level will increase dealing with someone who is high maintenance. Hire someone who is cantankerous, demanding, and with inadequate people skills and you personally will be frustrated. This unnecessary frustration could hinder your performance.

WORST CASE: TERMINATION

What if you need to terminate the person you hired? This is the ultimate failure and may be unavoidable, but the costs escalate dramatically. Consider the following.

Time reinvested and the monetary cost of a new search. Remember: hiring the right people is time-intensive and executive recruiting is expensive to do. These costs all start over when you need to refill the position vacated by the unsuccessful hire.

Your company may have legal exposure for wrongful discharge. Most people don't sue when terminated, but when they do it could cost the organization. Dealing with litigation, even if you win, can be a time-consuming and expensive headache that distracts you from the real business of your organization.

The cost of the terminated employee's pay, benefits, relocation, and severance could be substantial. These expended funds have not helped the company, nor have they contributed to your organization's financial success.

HIRING FRIENDS

As a general rule, it is bad policy to hire friends. Even worse, if they report to you, you may be suspected of favoritism and your friend most likely will expect special treatment. This will create resentment. Sometimes hiring a friend is unavoidable, but usually there are many

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other well-qualified candidates available. Here is an example, from my past, of the unwise practice of hiring friends.

Once I was recruiting for an opening in my division, and my boss, the company's president, said to me, "So and so is a friend of mine and I can't wait to bring him into the company. He's a great guy." My response was: "Sure I will interview him; however, I will make the judgment on his qualifications and whether or not he is qualified for this position." I interviewed this person and, while a likeable person, I declined to hire him as he was clearly not qualified for the position. The president ultimately hired his friend in a newly created position elsewhere in the organization and, as I will relate later, to disastrous results.

PROMOTING FROM WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

It is always smart to try to promote from within your organization. Make your search competitive so that you hire the best candidate available whether that person currently works for your company or is employed elsewhere. Be sure that you have clear requirements for the position so that if you hire someone who is not a staff member you can justify the hire based on objective criteria. Make the process a transparent one to ensure fairness.

AVOID STIGMATIZING THE UNEMPLOYED

The traditional wisdom is that it is always better to hire someone who is employed. I don't agree, as at any given time there is a large well-qualified pool of executive talent looking for positions. Give unemployed candidates an equal opportunity with those who are employed.

Once I was between jobs and interviewing for a management position in book publishing company. The first person who interviewed me was the HR director. His opening line in our interview was, "So you are out of work." That may have been true but that is one turn-off to avoid. "What am I, chopped liver?" was my initial

reaction. Clearly this HR director viewed me as unemployed, and therefore undesirable.

OTHER STAFF COLLEAGUES SHOULD INTERVIEW EXECUTIVE LEVEL CANDIDATES

In addition to your interviewing the candidate, your boss should interview the candidate. Also, it is a good practice to have a couple of peers and subordinate staff members interview this person. Why? The more looks at the candidate the better. We all have different abilities when it comes to judging the potential of candidates who could become our colleagues. Plus, it is vital to pick up any tell-tale negative signs when interviewing candidates, and with a number of interviewers, most likely you will be able to identify any danger spots.

Here's an example of what can go wrong with limited interviews of an executive candidate. One president I worked for hired a new CFO and "snuck" him in the organization's back door. In this instance, only the HR administrator interviewed this candidate. When I met the person, I thought: "Something is wrong with this person." And just about everyone else in the company felt the same way that I did. The CFO turned out to have an interpersonal style that was on a par with Attila the Hun, a drill sergeant, and Don Rickles. The president fired the CFO after one year as universally people said, "We can't work with this jerk."

Could this unfortunate situation have been prevented? Absolutely; by employing a more robust process to include multiple interviews with staff members at various levels of the organization you build in safeguards against poor hiring decisions. A top executive position such as CFO has an impact on all areas of the organization and it is even more important that a top executive be a comfortable fit for the entire organization.

A WORD FOR ASSOCIATIONS

Associations engage in a number of information businesses, including professional certification, conferences, education, and publishing. When recruiting managers it

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is wise to keep in mind the major differences between associations and commercial companies.

One of the major differences is the role of member volunteers and their interactions with association staff. For more on this subject, I suggest you read, *Political Success in Associations: Making the Volunteer-Staff Relationship Work* (A-14, 2010, 6 pages). This *McHugh Publication* and others on association publishing are available at my Web site, [Association Publishing Free](#).

ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Experienced Human Resources professionals are a major asset in your recruiting activities. As you work in concert with your HR specialist in recruiting, keep in mind that you need to define *your needs* in a new hire. Most likely your HR department will have hiring procedures which you should follow. However, in the final analysis, you are responsible for the ultimate success—or failure—of any new candidate you hire.

QUESTIONS TO ASK BEFORE YOU START

Before you start the recruiting process ask these questions:

Do we need to fill this position? Is there a need for this position? Have the responsibilities of this job been identified? Can the responsibilities be consolidated into other staff member jobs? How much of this job can you take over without hindering your performance? Is this position redundant? Should this position go the way of attrition?

Have you reviewed the position description? Does the current position description need a revision? If you have revised the position description, has it been approved by other executives including your boss and HR director? If the position description is revised, does the salary grade need to be reviewed?

Have you established the outcomes you want to achieve with this position? What are the key drivers (goals and objectives) for success in this position? What needs to be

accomplished by the new executive? How will you measure success?

Who will mentor this new colleague? Who will ensure that this individual will be provided daily direction and counsel so that he/she succeeds? Who can help integrate this person into the culture of your organization? Avoid the hire-sink-or-swim syndrome that afflicts so many organizations. Your responsibility is to invest the time to help the person you hired succeed.

BLAME GAME

What if the new hire is the wrong fit, a political disaster, or just plain incompetent? Who is accountable? Most organizations try to blame the failed employee. Wrong. *The hirer is responsible if a new staff member fails.* Look in the mirror and ask, “Why was this person hired, what was the vetting process, who made the hiring decisions, and how can the hiring process be strengthened?”

Remember the president I told you about. He hired his friend for a newly established sales executive position. He relocated this person and family over 500 miles. Once in place the president offered no support or mentorship to his friend. In fact, the president did not know what the new job entailed.

The new sales executive, naïve about office politics, was assassinated politically by other entrenched managers who saw this person encroaching on their turf and as a threat to their power. The president then complained privately to me numerous times what a disaster this person was. Who do you think was responsible for this person's failure?

STEPS TO TAKE TO ENSURE SUCCESSFUL RECRUITING

What is successful recruiting? It is a combination of art and science. It is about chemistry and interpersonal communications. Ask yourself, “How do I feel about this person?” Once you feel positive about the chemistry, your job is to ensure that the candidate has the right qualifications to succeed in the position.

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Defining job requirements, desired outcomes, success metrics, and expectations is vital. Ensure that the position description is current with the requirements of the position. Take your time, don't rush, and be deliberate and thorough. Conduct multiple interviews with people working in different levels of the organization. Require at least two authorizing signatures—three better—before you hire.

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McHugh Executive Recruiting Services

John B. "Jack" McHugh is an experienced executive recruiter with a specialty in commercial and nonprofit publishing, including college, business, technical, professional, religious, and association publications. He has written extensively about the field of effective publishing management, drawing on his expertise as a successful executive of both book and journal programs. He can also assist you in recruiting for a variety of association and society positions, including, CEOs (Executive Director.)

Tap into McHugh's extensive knowledge of the publishing industry to find top talent. Save on recruiting costs since McHugh charges a fixed fee instead of the costly retainer percentage used by most executive search firms.

McHugh's full recruiting service for publishing executives offers these advantages:

- Save expensive staff time involved in screening resumes and preliminary interviewing of candidates.

- Use McHugh as a third-party independent interviewer to validate your own observations.

- Get an expert evaluation of prospects and final candidates.

- Receive a comprehensive interview report customized to your job needs. (This service is available on an a la carte per interview basis.)

- Save money by paying a flat fee vs. typical 33 1/3% of first year salary charged by executive search firms.

Free McHugh Papers on Executive Recruiting at <https://goo.gl/DeX8PJ>

Free Expert Interviews <http://goo.gl/l3iyfz>

- I-1, McHugh Interviews McHugh on Consulting, 2013, revised

- I-11, McHugh Interviews McHugh on Executive Recruiting, 2011

About John B. McHugh

John B. "Jack" McHugh is a 40-year veteran of the publishing business. Jack has worked as an executive for Houghton-Mifflin, Wadsworth, and Saint Mary's Press. Jack is also an experienced association publishing executive. For seven years, he was Publisher and Director of Programs at the American Society for Quality and for a two-year period, he served as the Interim Publisher at the Project Management Institute. Jack's specialties include association/nonprofit publishing, book publishing, executive recruiting, journal publishing, rights and permissions, organizational design, and startups. He manages two LinkedIn™ groups, Association and Nonprofit Publishing and The Self-Employment Forum.

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