



# The Cambridge Perspective

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## Are You Asking the Right Questions?



When it comes to recruiting top talent, most organizations now rely on a mix of internal recruitment and executive search, in order to take advantage of the search firm's larger network, broader perspective and/or objective expertise. But hiring an executive search firm doesn't mean losing control over the process, and there are several steps you can take to ensure you're getting the maximum return for your search investment.

A professional recruiter does the fieldwork for you – candidate mapping, networking, interviewing, verifying credentials and references - and presents only the best candidates for your consideration. An insightful recruiter who listens carefully should be able to identify those who have a strong cultural fit with your

organization, increasing their chances of success.

But, as an outsider, even a skilled and perceptive recruiting expert can only get so close. Their information is based on secondhand feedback, often 'filtered' for public use, and subject to a world of interpretation. In addition, there are numerous factors that an outsider may not be aware of that can influence an individual's performance - political issues, team dynamics, operating control, etc. - and affect their ultimate success.

While a search firm takes the legwork out of the process, they're not a substitute for your firsthand knowledge and gut instincts. You are the final judge of which candidate is right for your organization. By asking the same questions as the recruiter, you'll likely gain no further perspective or insights.

The recruiter's observations from their interviews should be shared with you in advance to provide a clear picture of the candidates and their qualifications in relation to your specific needs. So *your* goal should be to expand on the search consultant's findings by investigating how each

candidate will fit within your particular organizational culture, team, and operating structure.

Working with this strategy will help you dig deeper, cover more ground, and focus your attention on more relevant information than the "traditional interview" approach that most people rely on.

We are often asked for suggestions from our clients on how

to get the most out of their candidate interviews, and while there are often specific role or industry-related issues to cover, we recommend that you consider:

First and foremost, will this person fit both your short-term requirement and long-term strategy? A potentially short-term requirement, such as a new role or project responsibility, might be better addressed with an Interim Manager. Interim Managers can get quickly up-to-speed, and can be extended for long-term engagements or often full-time roles, but their termination, due to market conditions or even unforeseen operating changes, doesn't affect morale or your public image.

On the other hand, a role may require someone with a specific skill set, but it



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may be advantageous to seek someone who can be coached into a broader role in the future.

What are the candidates' long-term career aspirations? Do they harmonize with the organization's needs and culture? Someone seeking a fast track won't remain long in a bureaucratic organization. Be candid about the culture, highlighting the benefits of the organization, and even if it's not ideal, you can show the potential for change that can be a motivating factor for the right candidate. How will this person's style work with others

in the organization, i.e. are they gregarious, laid back or reserved, and which would work better with your group? How will they deal with Board Members or Line Managers or diverse groups that may have differing cultures? It may help to know what traits or characteristics don't work well in your organization, and look for indications of these in your meeting.

How do they perceive themselves, and does the role require someone with these traits?

How well do they 'speak the language' of the industry and how well are they networked? This may or may not be an issue, but it's one that can sometimes demonstrate a lack of technical

knowledge or industry presence that could hinder their success. It may also identify solid business connections and relationships that could be leveraged at a later date.

Does the candidate share any mutual contacts (who might then have useful insights to share)? Firsthand knowledge can be irreplaceable, as long as the source is a reliable one, so be sure

you trust your source. Of course, the more sources you have, the more perspective you'll get.

It's also a good idea to allow one or two

team members an opportunity to meet the candidates, if only briefly, to get a quick impression of the chemistry between them. These individuals may have valuable insights to share that you may not be able to obtain on your own.

When preparing your interview questions, consider:

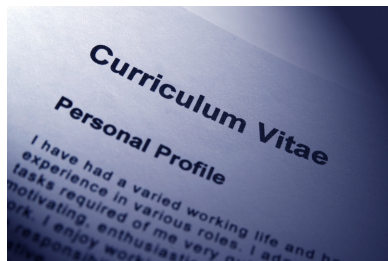
- Ask for examples of both successes and failures in their career. We learn most from our failures, and great leaders will take responsibility for both.
- Ask the candidate how he/she would deal with a particular situation they are likely to face, and why they would choose this approach to get

insight into their thought processes. This works best when there's more than one good answer. It should also give you insight into how they solve problems - are they quick and creative or careful and methodical - and may indicate how they will deal with stressful situations or ethical dilemmas, depending on how the question is framed.

- Provide two opposite traits, and ask which they feel they are most like to get a better idea where they fit (or think they fit) between the two, keeping in mind what works best in your organization.
- Whenever possible, ask WHY? This question will showcase their communication and sales skills (or lack of), and sometimes reveal contradictions or inconsistencies in their stories.

Your challenge is to determine which candidate will be most successful in your organization, and that depends not just on the candidate's skills and experience, but their intellectual and emotional fit for the role, the team and the larger organization.

Don't take a backseat in your recruiting efforts! You'll get more out of it by ensuring that you know your needs, communicate effectively, and maximize your own opportunities.



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**In business, you get what you want by giving other people what they want.**

**- Alice Foote MacDougall**

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**Cambridge Management Planning offers a full suite of services including Executive Search, Board Search, Interim Management, Executive Coaching and Career Transition services. Call us for more information.**

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