

NONPROFIT
EXECUTIVE SEARCHES



LIMITING
MISCONCEPTIONS

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About Nonprofit Executive Searches

Selecting the right candidate for a high-level position at a nonprofit or ministry organization can be daunting — even paralyzing at times. There are many ways to find the right leader for the job, but just as many ways to find the wrong one. All organizations want a great executive at the helm, but far fewer are aware of all that is required to conduct an effective search from the beginning, nor the level of leadership quality that can be acquired when every available option is explored thoroughly.

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One of the first questions an organization faces when tasked with finding a new executive leader is whether to hire a professional search firm to assist in the process or to go it alone. This discussion is typically a short one, however, because many nonprofits and ministries quickly dismiss working with an outside team as a prohibitive option, assuming it only works for big corporations. As a result, their options are immediately limited to what can be done with their internal resources. In some cases, an in-house-only effort may be enough, but often, an organization can benefit greatly from the investment in an executive search firm.

For a nonprofit or ministry to make a fully informed decision about its approach, search committees must first understand the common misconceptions about utilizing a search firm and the potential value of external resources as well as internal.

1

SEARCH FIRMS ARE COST-PROHIBITIVE.

Utilizing an executive search firm is a viable route to take when pursuing an excellent leader, as it can greatly reduce risk, provide invaluable expertise and consultation, and ensure the right candidate is selected for the job. But as budgets get tighter, many organizations considering outsourcing search management for the first time quickly reject the idea because of sticker shock. The short-term savings of doing it yourself, however, can often pale in comparison to the resulting long-term financial and organizational costs.

The statistics surrounding “hire-rehire” are not encouraging, especially when selecting for top leadership positions. In one week, for example, FaithSearch Partners learned of three organizations that initially rejected the idea of retained search due to perceived costs that have since let their senior leader go. Each of the incumbents had been in place less than a year — some as little as four months. When this happens, the process must start over, and often the organization uses the same approach involved in the initial hiring decision, expecting different results.

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The fear of not “getting it right,” therefore, can be paralyzing. Get it wrong, and the organization could be facing a total re-hire like those mentioned above, costing it exorbitant amounts of money, not to mention an incredible amount of wasted time. The higher the position in question, the higher the risk.

It’s true that hiring an executive search firm is typically a more significant initial financial investment than an in-house effort, but it’s also true that the benefits often far outweigh the cost. Usually, for less than what an organization would pay a leader for three to four months (salary and benefits), a thorough search process can be managed by a reputable, retained firm. This long-term perspective makes an executive search firm a more viable option for an organization than it may appear *at first glance*.

2

SOCIAL NETWORKS AND SEARCH ENGINE RESEARCH **ARE MORE OR LESS AS EFFECTIVE** IN DETERMINING A POOL OF QUALITY CANDIDATES.

The digital age has changed the landscape for any leadership team facing transition. On one hand, websites and social networks like LinkedIn have enhanced the ability for in-house recruitment committees to potentially access quality candidates, giving them further reach than ever before. On the other, anyone can access this self-reported information, and the sheer volume can be overwhelming. How does a committee sort through the noise?

Typically, only unemployed or “activity looking” candidates post their backgrounds on internet jobsites or respond to job postings. While there are likely solid prospects among those in career transition, the best candidates are customarily those who are not looking, but persuadable. It’s difficult for an internal search process to identify candidates who are happy where they are not seeking a new opportunity. And if an organization does attempt to reach employed prospects, it is often an awkward encounter. Employed prospects will have concerns about confidentiality and may not be receptive to direct inquiries from organizations for fear of the knowledge of their potential interest circling back to their own employer.

3

A SEARCH FIRM CANNOT FULLY **UNDERSTAND ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE, VALUE AND MISSION** THE WAY AN INTERNAL HIRING COMMITTEE CAN.

A fair argument for an internal search committee over a search firm is that an in-house team will be more familiar with the internal culture, and therefore more apt to select a candidate who will fit well within the organization. However, a good search firm will dig deep to determine a organizational values and cultural characteristics, but will also have the added value of remaining objective. A quality firm will avoid bias toward leaders similar to existing leadership, who may not bring anything new to the table. Introducing a set of fresh eyes and a new perspective to the board room while maintaining the organization’s core identity is something a firm can do well as an impartial third party.

CONCLUSION

Hiring a search firm is not an unattainable approach for ministries and nonprofits, if the long view is kept in mind. In addition to the benefits outlined above, the investment in a search firm also has the added value of confidentiality, a proactive approach to pursuing candidates, in-depth psychological evaluations of candidates to determine personality fit, and even a guarantee of the successful candidate's tenure in the position.

It is not a quick fix, but bringing in a search firm is a viable option that should be carefully evaluated when organizations face a search for the leader who will be at the forefront of its mission. When nonprofits, churches and ministries consider the best course of action in light of all the paths available to them, they help to ensure the organization finds the right candidate for the right reasons at the right time.

ABOUT FAITHSEARCH PARTNERS:

FaithSearch Partners is the only executive search firm in the U.S. focusing exclusively on serving faith-based hospitals, healthcare organizations, churches, ministries and colleges/universities. Based in Houston with locations in Dallas, Denver, Los Angeles, Orlando, Nashville and Asheville, FaithSearch is able to serve faith-based clients in all regions. As we continually strive to remain the preeminent executive search firm for faith-based organizations, we work every day to fulfill an even greater purpose – one that extends beyond the details of our day-to-day and ventures into the larger stories of the people and organizations we serve. We are dedicated to providing lasting solutions and championing faith-driven leaders. FaithSearch exists to empower faith-based organizations with the right people at the right time to help drive their unique mission of ministry forward.