

## Executive Search Traps

### The Most Costly And Most Preventable Crises For HR Leaders

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As the economy continues to recover from ‘The Great Recession’ and we all reflect not only on lessons learned but the critical importance of avoiding the mistakes of the past, your organization is increasingly dependent not only on the strengths of its stars, but also each and every one of the key contributors around them.

We’re all wiser, smarter, leaner and more focused than ever on driving business results. Now it’s time to stand and deliver.

Yet, if executive recruiting is arguably the most important task in the world of business, and corporate talent management stands at that critical business driver with the potential to transform the HR function, isn’t now just the right time to evaluate the process behind your organization’s most costly, visible and consequential hires?

I’m sure just the mention of executive search will immediately conjure experiences and likely just as many frustrations that you’d rather forget. That’s likely because key business leaders – yes, most likely on your Executive Leadership Team or on your organization’s board and among your front line hiring managers – fell into any one of a number of Executive Search Traps, as outlined herein.

Bottom-line, the results of any executive search assignment are pre-ordained by the due diligence, or lack thereof, that your organization and its most senior business leaders invest in deciding how any search can and should be conducted. Quality in, quality out. It’s really that simple.

### **Executive Search Traps**

The HR Leader is in a unique position not only to feel the pain of these symptoms, but also to advocate for a quick diagnosis and the kind of business intervention to avoid rushed, uninformed management team decisions relating to executive recruiting and succession.

#### **Symptom**

#### **Diagnosis**

“Executive vacancy? Call the headhunters!”  
planning

No senior-management succession

“Which headhunters can we defend?”

Decisions grounded in reputation, not results

“We spend a lot, don’t get a lot.”  
engagement

Decentralized Search Consultant

“I’ll engage the firm who just recruited me.”      Quid-Pro-Quo search consultant engagement

“Why is this search taking so long?”      Traditional search model=traditional search cycle

“Are we really committed to diversity?”      Commitment revealed in inclusive candidate slates

“We got great results from our RFP.”      Focus on *cost-per-hire* rather than *quality-of-hire*

Aside from these conversational warning signs that your organization isn’t getting a good return on its significant investment in senior-management recruiting, consider for a moment that while the best-known executive search consultants may get a few more candidate research calls returned, they also have more places they can’t take your next search assignment.

*Forbes* acknowledged this years ago: “The largest recruiting firms are handicapped in doing the very job for which they are hired.”

That doesn’t mean a large search firm isn’t right for your next assignment. It only means that, the more you peel back that onion, the more you may realize just how much more due diligence you should invest in the assessment, selection and engagement of those who would help you engage in the critical business of deciding who leads.

As legendary UCLA men’s basketball coach John Wooden might agree, it’s all about choreographing informed decision-making that puts the emphasis on research and results and not reputation or familiarity alone. In basketball, the game is won on the practice floor. When it comes to executive recruiting, the result depends on what you’ve done to mitigate the inherent risks, accelerate the process, and contain incalculable opportunity costs.

Wooden’s own wisdom backs this up. His words may inspire you and provide some particularly compelling insight for HR leadership for the year ahead. Consider these gems:

- “If you don’t have the time to do it right, when will you have the time to do it over?”
- “It isn’t what you do, but how you do it.”
- “The main ingredient of stardom is the rest of the team.”

As an HR leader, transforming the way your organization attracts and recruits new executives is something that will bear fruit, if you commit to it, and the results will be visible across the enterprise.

There are many other, far more daunting challenges that will test your own HR leadership abilities in the coming months, especially as the pendulum that is the executive employment market swings back in the direction of top talent and gives superior leaders far more options for renewing their careers elsewhere.

If you can avoid the common executive search traps that so many others fall into, you'll put your organization in a position to fulfill the promise of each new executive hire.

*Described by BusinessWeek as “the authority on headhunters,” Joseph Daniel McCool is the author of Deciding Who Leads, recognized widely as “one of the best business books of 2008.” He is the principal of The McCool Group LLC, which advises HR leaders on the most effective assessment, selection, engagement, and score carding of retained executive search assignments and corporate relationships with retained search consultants. He can be reached at [Joe@TheMcCoolGroup.com](mailto:Joe@TheMcCoolGroup.com).*