

Careers

Let's Make It Happen

9 Keys For Candidates Working With Executive Search Consultants.

By
Andrew THOMSON



Amrop

Leaders For What's Next

Let's Make It Happen

9 Keys For Candidates Working With Executive Search Consultants

Patrick couldn't understand it. In his pursuit of a new role he had dealt with five executive search firms and his experience had been less than positive. He had secured a (brief) meeting with two, and the other three had failed to respond to his emails, or return his calls. He had been proactive and dynamic in staying in touch, he thought. Yet after three months' chasing, nothing had transpired. Radio silence. Great.

He opened his laptop and scrutinized his CV — again. It ticked all the right boxes, surely? Vice President of a multinational brand in his previous role, managing a team of 150 people. He had grown market share by an average of 30% in all the brand's operating markets over the past five years. He was appreciated by his staff and peers. It had all seemed to be going so smoothly.

Then along came a new CEO with a mission: to integrate Patrick's brand into an even more successful range. Patrick was politely thanked for his ten years' service and offered a generous severance package, which, equally politely, he accepted.

Now Patrick was sitting in my office. "I don't get it," he said. "I'm positive about what has happened, I'm seeing it as a new step forward in life. I'm financially comfortable. I'm in great shape. I'm hardly desperate. I'm not bitter, either. I accept the CEO's decision, it made total business sense. So what's going on?"

What, indeed? Every week of the year, I'm contacted by outstanding, talented people like Patrick. People who deserve the next step up in their careers and who experience similar treatment from executive search firms. It's time to help executives better understand the inner workings of this mysterious entity — the retained executive search firm. To manage expectations of what we do and what we can deliver. And better still, to give some insider guidance on what 'ticks our boxes', beyond an exceptional track record.

So let's open the door to our kitchen...



Andrew Thomson is a Partner with Amrop in China, focusing on Industrial Markets overall, but the Automotive, Mobility and Transportation Sectors in particular. A graduate in Law and MBA, Andrew has worked for 20 years in Consulting, Professional Services management, Human Capital management advisory and Executive Search.

His earlier career included 5 years with Touche Ross Management Consulting, and 17 years with KPMG, where he was a member of KPMG's Regional Board and Executive Committee.

He is currently working on a new product, CareerNEXT, a coaching advisory offering for executives who need to reposition themselves in the job market, proactively, or in response to a career-impacting 'event'.

Executive search people work with a high degree of intensity. Client demands are often, by necessity, complex and pressured. There are multiple variables at play and any one of these can compromise an assignment at any moment.

First, an admission...

Our profession still has a lot of work to do to demonstrate our value, both to our clients and to our candidates. And we have challenges.

For a start, executive search is a highly competitive field, one with few barriers to entry. It's possible to step into this world with a desk, a laptop and a telephone, but not necessarily a great track record, armed only with a contact list and a punishingly competitive pricing strategy. And even if this may not allow the new entrant to stay the distance long term, such activity devalues the profession. And it creates distraction all round.

Executive search people work with a high degree of intensity. Client demands are often, by necessity, complex and pressured. There are multiple variables at play and any one of these can compromise an assignment at any moment. Assignments cover a wide spectrum. From the 'lucky project' (the 'square peg fit' candidate is immediately found and available for the 'square hole' opportunity) to searches so fiendishly demanding that there is no prospect of good candidates emerging any time soon.

In light of this, I was reflecting recently on what our candidates might do to give themselves the best chance of finding that perfect next career step they've been looking for.

Here are Thomson's Top Tips to Make It Happen



- 1 Be targeted and aligned
- 2 Give us the tools to help you build the bridge
- 3 Suppress your inner designer
- 4 Guide us
- 5 Build trust and a great relationship
- 6 Be transparent and open
- 7 Establish follow-up preferences
- 8 Listen to our guidance
- 9 Think of additional options

 [Read on for more...](#)

1



Be targeted and aligned

Check out the biographies of the Partners in your chosen firm before making your approach. Here, it's important to understand how search firms are structured and operate: most search professionals have a 'major' and a 'minor' focus in terms of the industries and functions they specialize in, and are working on specific mandates. So the more you can align interests upfront, the more resonance you're going to have. And it goes without saying that the bigger the search firm, the more pronounced this factor is going to be.

In presenting your CV, crystallize your Executive Story. A great Executive Story, concisely and accurately summing up your value proposition, is an enormous help to all stakeholders, and can form a critical part of the conversations we have with our clients. I'll write more about creating a great Executive Story another day, and you can also take a look at an Amrop interview with my Amrop colleague Eelco van Eijck: *'The Great Executive Re-Brand'*. But here's a heads up: do concentrate on your value rather than your job description. I've seen search professionals yawn when they see a CV that simply lists job responsibilities. We really want to see what you've achieved and the value you've created, preferably measured in clearly quantifiable terms. In what way have you been different? Where and how have you innovated? Also, I'll say more about CVs in another article, but here's the thing: I've seen multi-billion dollar CEOs described beautifully on one page, and mid-stage careers detailed across 11 pages. Guess which one I like best?

2



Give us the tools to help you build the bridge

3



Suppress your inner designer

You may have come up with an attractively formatted CV or PowerPoint that is populated with infographics and other visuals that encapsulate your achievements with great finesse and impact. Keep hold of it. But know that it's counter-productive to do *only* this. We need a simpler version too. Why? Because most of the time, clients need us to integrate Word text into Candidate Report templates that enable them to instantly cross compare profiles.

If you're coming to us proactively, please do your best to 'signpost' us to companies who you think are great targets for you and where you think you will add the most value.



Guide us


4

 **Read on for more...**



Amrop

5



Build trust and a great relationship

It's a well-researched fact that most people like to do business with people in whom they have confidence. Guess what? Search folks are no different. They'll work harder for you and represent you more effectively if you've built a trusted relationship with them (see authorities such as David Maister, or Prof. Robert Cialdini).

We do our very best to get to know you well and present you effectively to our clients. One of the most embarrassing (and potentially harmful things) is when something a search professional should have known unexpectedly 'surfaces' at interview with a client. It's better to be safe than sorry. No matter how well we structure our interviewing process, if you don't volunteer something significant, (or exaggerate, compensation being a classic example), then we might miss it. If you have doubts about a situation or an opportunity, err on the side of transparency as early as possible. If there's something from your past you're embarrassed about, please be honest. We can probably help you mitigate the issue.

6



Be transparent and open

7



Establish follow-up preferences

Do ask your search consultant how best you should stay in contact with him or her. Personally, I'm more or less OK with check-ins and calls. However, some search professionals really do take a *'don't call me, I'll call you'* approach. Over-zealous follow-up in this case can backfire, justifiably or not. So do ask the question, and keep the answer in mind.

Most of the time, across most of our industry, we really want you to succeed. We can offer truly valuable insight, especially when we're guiding you on client tastes and preferences. We appreciate it when we see executives taking note (or even better, notes!). Our interviews are structured not only to get the maximum information for the position we have been mandated to fill, but also for career counseling. In case you are not a fit for the position in question, we want you to walk out with a positive mind set, with more information on what kind of things you have to invest in before making a next career step, or changing your career direction.

8



Listen to our guidance

9



Think of additional options

Remember that we are only one channel to market for executive job seekers. I have no statistics here, but I suspect that even if one added up the number of all executive positions covered by the world's Top 50 Search firms, this might represent only (say) 10% of all the executive opportunities that might be available to you in any given industry. Therefore, in addition to considering how you might be a great candidate for us, please think about your other routes to market.

Let's Make it Happen

So, I do hope this glance into our kitchen was useful. It's based on my experience, on what I see every day, and crystallizes the elements that help us communicate positively and effectively with our clients. We can never guarantee you the outcome you might be looking for, but we always want you to give yourself the best chance of success. Either in your next interaction with Amrop, or indeed with any other search firm.

Further reading

Looking for more career inspiration?

You can find a wealth of ideas and guidance on www.amrop.com/insights

I Am My Biggest Project

The New Shape Of Work

The Age of No Age

The Great Executive Rebrand



About Amrop

With over 70 offices in all world regions, Amrop is a trusted advisor in Executive Search, Board and Leadership Services. It is the largest partnership of its kind.

Amrop advises the world's most dynamic organizations on finding and positioning Leaders For What's Next: top talent, adept at working across borders in markets around the world.

Amrop's mission: shaping sustainable success through inspiring leaders.

www.amrop.com/offices