Reliable Leadership Advice™

Outperform: Attract the Most Relevant Leaders in 5 Steps

It's not what or who you know – it's how you reach who you need.

As Boards and CEOs, the task is clear: To lead organisations that will outperform. As the success of organisations relies on effective leaders, it stands to reason that searching for them and attracting them is extremely important.

Apple founder and former CEO, Steve Jobs put it simply: "Go after the cream of the cream". But once you know which leaders represent 'the cream of the cream' for your business ***how can you find and attract them?***

The Way Ahead Series, by Mercuri Urval

Our team advise and support thousands of leaders across all sectors.

In this series of articles our CEO, Richard Moore, distils practical advice from real leader successes and challenges.

Advice focussed on how leaders can ensure their organisations – teams – outperform.

Disruption Exposes Two Significant Flaws in the Old Leader Search Model

CASE STUDY: LEADING GLOBAL LAW FIRM

A few years ago, a well-respected global law firm set up a new business unit. In a conventional approach to attract a new leader, executives running similar business units in peer firms were approached – starting with those connected to the search consultant and hiring firm. The approach work found other connected candidates with similar roles. An attractive résumé emerged, a candidate who was available and lead a similar business unit for a high-profile competitor. The deal was brokered – but less than 12 months later failure led to a large severance cheque.

What went wrong?

In the 'old normal', many thought it was enough to have leaders with similar leadership experience who would take on the job. Your personal network, or the network of a contact or search consultant, was regarded as enough to find a new leader. But as many suspected for some time, this conventional approach to search was always flawed. Today, advances in business and HR practices – widespread use of data, greater transparency, and increased expectations – have highlighted the conventional network-based recruitment model's major problems.

- The first flaw relates to success of newly appointed leaders. It turns out that experience in a similar past job does not translate to performance in a new job and that personally known contacts of a search-consultant or executive do not make more effective new leaders – especially where change is fast, and roles are complex.
- The second flaw relates to diversity of newly appointed leaders. Through an excessive focus on prior connections and resume similarity, similar people are put forward for jobs and so similar people get jobs. The restrictive effect of the conventional search model reduces leader diversity, a major problem that is widely observed by researchers, industry bodies and businesses alike.

It is now clear, to attract the most effective leaders a more analytical approach is needed.

How to Attract the Most Relevant Leaders in 5 Steps

To be able to employ the most effective leader possible, you will need to know which relevant leaders are available. This necessitates a profound knowledge of where such leaders can be found and an analytical and systematic approach to map them. The candidate market approach must focus on track record elements that predict task performance – not recycling of candidates found in similar roles or industry verticals. Follow these 5 steps effectively, for better leader attraction outcomes:

1. **Set the research strategy by precisely analysing the required leader results and attraction arguments first.**
   - Based on the vital tasks and performance context, what leader profile is searched for? How might this evolve over time?
   - Targeted attractive offer. Why should the right leader be open to join you?
   - How will they be appreciated?
   - What is appealing in your culture and team?
   - What is worthy about the challenge?
   - What impact will they be able to have?

2. **Document and verify the most important performance-predictors and the track record evidence** for plausible candidate to be included.
   - Track record: What experience and prior achievements are necessary for short-term success?
   - Demonstrated competence: What skills and abilities are needed?
   - Culture impact: What organisational contribution, and leadership impact is required?
   - Evidence of further potential: What abilities beyond short term requirements are desirable?
   - Motivation: What aspirations would ensure a fit for this opportunity?

3. **Systematically appraise the candidate market by conducting a fresh inclusive analysis** of the candidate market – within, and broader than, existing networks.
   - Leader mapping and analysis. Where are the leaders you need?
   - Who knows the network of leader talent you need to target?
   - What is the best way to map relevant talent?
   - What similar roles and organisations are irrelevant and so should be discounted?

4. **Regardless of any prior connection, benchmark candidates' positions and career progression through fact-based track record evaluation** (to ensure high objectivity).
   - Business context
   - Organisation
   - Role and function
   - Geography

5. **Engage and attract the most relevant candidates** based on arguments that come from a very detailed understanding of the specific job and context (exactly what is the opportunity and how the needed result can be achieved – Step 1) and a deep insight into the candidate (beneath the surface of the résumé – Step 4).
   - How to make contact in the most interesting and attractive way?
   - How to influence your target to be interested in you?
   - What messages to communicate, when and by who?

CASE STUDY PART 2: LEADING GLOBAL LAW FIRM

Returning to our well-respected global law firm. The relevant track record that would have predicted success was the ability – in this new firm's context – to set up a new business. The selected leader that failed, had run an established practice – but had never started one and built it from scratch. Their track record was not precisely relevant to the result needed. To compound this start-up error in step 1 and 2, the search lacked systematic rigour and was skewed to known contacts and certain narrowly defined résumés (in step 3 and 4). The approach lacked necessary diversity – the wrong candidates were addressed, the method lacked analytical thoroughness and so an unsuccessful outcome ensued. Before step 5 was reached, the flaw was already built in.

Today, only an effectively targeted, engaging, and inclusive search will work. Thorough enough not to miss suitable candidates, focussed enough to not waste time on those who cannot perform the vital tasks you need. Using a skilful expert team that follows a structured and broad approach will increase success chances.

With a systematic and complete mapping – focused on required leader results and the specific context in which they must be achieved – you will consistently identify and engage candidates with relevant professional background and track-record to succeed. Following this a thorough evaluation can be made so you know which candidate will be most successful and suitable shorter- and longer-term.

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