



BELLOAKS

EXECUTIVE SEARCH

## Headhunter to Trusted Advisor: The Future of Executive Search

*By Randy Hain, Managing Partner of Bell Oaks*

If you are a hiring manager for your organization, you have probably worked with a recruiting firm to help you fill your open positions. It is likely that you experienced frustration with the process of sorting through the large stack of resumes submitted for review and how few of those resumes were a fit for your opening. It also may have seemed curious that the recruiting firm never actually met you or interviewed the candidates in person before recommending them. Did you ask yourself if their consultants really knew you and your company at all?

These scenarios are all too real for hiring managers and human resources departments who conduct business with the search industry. Fortunately, there is a better model out there. For the past few years, I have witnessed a slow, steady, positive evolution for professional services firms in general in how they interact with clients. A majority of search firms have been lethargic to join in, but our industry's *survival* depends on our willingness to be active participants in the change. Our focus should be on personally meeting clients, interviewing candidates face-to-face, recruiting and networking for quality candidates (instead of mining the Internet) and working to help clients attract the best talent. We must always put our client's needs first and represent ourselves, our clients and our candidates ethically and honorably.

Our mission should be to become trusted partners and advisors who add clear and measurable value for our clients. But it's not easy. It requires a selfless devotion to the client's best interest, a deep knowledge of their company and culture, the highest ethical standards, strong values, clear communication and absolute candor. As Jag Sheth and Andrew Sobel wrote in their breakthrough book, *Clients for Life*, trusted advisors must practice three types of independence: *emotional independence*, *intellectual independence* and *financial independence*. Only by achieving this can we be objective, establish trust and offer real value.

So what's the big deal? Aren't we talking about simple recruiting? Not at all. Talent acquisition is an ongoing and critical focus for any successful company. Filling the search is just the first step, not the last. Companies need partners in the search industry who will understand their culture and needs of the position, lead the search process, provide counsel on a competitive offer that will be accepted, and coach the candidate on how to successfully resign from their previous company. Nothing simple about it.

Hiring managers should demand that the search firms they utilize rise to this challenge and be true business partners. Only through a combination of candid dialogue, earned credibility and objectivity can an environment exist where the search firm supplies talent that best fits the organization. Also, any good partnership starts with a sound relationship. Getting to know each other over coffee or lunch is a good way to break down barriers and truly understand one another. When clients begin to consider you a partner and not just a vendor, you may just be on the path to becoming a trusted advisor.

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