

How Do You Hire Staff from Outside Your Area of Expertise?

This question was posed by a member of our LinkedIn groups. The community has provided some excellent advice that could be useful to all.

Todd

Chief Executive Officer

“Being new to the role of executive director, I have never had to hire anybody from outside my area of expertise. When interviewing people for a position that you currently do or have done in the past, it is relatively easy, or at least easier, to determine the quality of a candidate's qualifications. However, now that I am a general manager, I have to hire people to perform jobs that I have never done, nor do I know much about. Without resorting to a headhunter, how can I intelligently sort through the CVs and conduct interviews?”

Comments (5)

Cate

Executive Director

One possibility is to look for someone with expertise in the field who would be willing to help you come up with a job description, review resumes, and participate in interviews as a volunteer project. Your board may be a good place to start looking for referrals to a potential volunteer with the appropriate qualifications.

Sandi

Executive Director

I agree with Cate. We use a couple of HR professionals to help us (as volunteers) with some of our interviewing for internal candidates. If your board does not have someone with the expertise, contact your local philanthropy center to see if they have a suggestion. As far as sorting resumes, compare the job duties/description to the incoming resumes for key words and phrases. This will help eliminate people who do not have the experience and filter in those who do.

Todd

Chief Executive Officer

Cate- While we have not officially organized as a nonprofit and, therefore, do not have a formal Board for me to approach, your suggestion brought to mind a cousin and the brother of a friend who might be able

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to help me with the description and such. Thank you for your input. Best regards, Todd.

Kathleen Yazbak

Partner, Executive Search, The Bridgespan Group

Be intentional about first year goals... even if the leader is unclear about every last functional skill required, s/he should know what the new leader must deliver in the job (ex: better cost containment, smooth budget process, etc).

Probe for similar examples from someone's background (Tell me about a cost containment initiative; why did you create it, what had worked/not worked previously and how did you lead that change?)

In writing the job description, get really clear about the candidate profile: number of years of experience, type of functional expertise required. Scanning other, similar job descriptions can help inform this

I agree with Cate about speaking with people who might have functional experience, BUT also speak with other EDs who have hired for that role.

Hope this helps and good luck with your search.

Bob

Executive Director

This can be a daunting task, particularly if it is for a technical position far removed from your skills and culture. Finding a board member partner in this is important for number of reasons but also look to other organizations for folks doing similar work. Key here is establishing a team that will be able to evaluate those skill areas where you are weak. I know this is challenging, but it might also be an opportunity to hire the right person, cement relations with a board member, and reach out to folks in your community. This might also be a way to interact with someone who has potential as board candidate or a non-board member on a committee.

Bridgestar (www.bridgestar.org), an initiative of the Bridgespan Group, provides a nonprofit management job board, content, and tools designed to help nonprofit organizations build strong leadership teams and individuals pursue career paths as nonprofit leaders.