

Hiring Tomorrow's Leaders Amidst Today's Crisis



Companies are far from operating in “business as usual” mode, but there are still business imperatives and targets that must be met. In fact, this crisis has highlighted areas in businesses where there are “cracks” – processes or functions that were acceptable before, but now must be changed or improved. It is this dichotomy, [as highlighted in one of our previous pieces](#), that is forcing executives to ask, *what's next?* In many cases, what's next is a recognition that the company must get on with business while making accommodation for the ongoing impact of the crisis.

We are now having frequent and substantive conversations with our clients, many who have seen these “cracks” appear, about upgrading talent or creating new functions that are now required in the life after COVID. In these conversations, there are three common questions: Is talent even looking for or interested in new opportunities right now? And even if they are, how do you tactically approach the recruiting and hiring process in this virtual, socially-distanced business environment? And finally, when you do find the right person, how do you virtually onboard them?

Is Good Executive Talent Available Today?

In our experience, the short answer is *yes*. At the beginning of the pandemic outbreak, many people were consumed by the crisis, hastily preparing for virtual work and safeguarding their health and wellbeing.

In the weeks and months since this massive upheaval, the extra time at home has been a welcome opportunity to reflect on life, both personally and professionally. Some executives are thinking, for the first time, that they want to do something different; others were already thinking about it and this situation has reinforced those aspirations.

In some cases, whole industries have been hit hard by this crisis, bringing their production and operations to a halt. The executives in these sectors represent a huge pool of possible candidates who may not have been available before.

The other, simpler factor to consider is that with no travel, commute, or hours of in-person meetings, many executives are much more likely to have time to pick up the phone and chat about potential opportunities.

How to Recruit in a Virtual Environment

The logistics are important, but first consider this: with uncertain economic implications ahead and an evolution in the way we work, interact, sell, and market, it's going to take an extraordinary value proposition to really sell a career opportunity to the best talent. This crisis has overhauled the landscape for many companies. Some have found glaring weaknesses. Others, however, are in the limelight, with financials strong and enviable market share gains. These situations naturally impact your employer brand, and executives know it. The recruiting process starts first and foremost with attracting the right candidates – careful consideration of how you'll go about it in this new environment is a crucial first step.

As for the logistics of recruiting in a virtual environment, the ability to connect has never been stronger. We've all leveraged technology to serve us better in this time – and with candidates more available than usual, virtual interviews and assessments should be speedy and flawless.

Of course, we understand that a virtual interview is rarely a 100% replacement for that in-person connection. There's a lack of genuine eye contact and body language that can reveal far more than the interview questions and answers themselves. That said, it's close enough for many companies to feel comfortable hiring virtually. For those that aren't, this process can still replace all but the final, in-person interview. With companies beginning to re-open, in-person meetings for the final candidates is a reasonable expectation.

Integrating Virtual Onboarding

While many companies are familiar with video interviews and screening before the pandemic, most are complete strangers to onboarding new executive-level team members in a remote environment. And there's a reason why onboarding has rarely been virtual in the past – it's challenging enough to do it successfully in person.

We have seen dozens of examples where companies are doing this successfully. It's still not ideal, but once the tactical parts of the onboarding are handled – digitized paperwork and delivery of equipment – Zoom meetings can be scheduled with stakeholders and direct reports for initial meet-and-greets, and any compliance training can be executed in a remote setting.

But after that comes true integration with the companies and its teams. Providing a supportive, immersive experience is the best way to onboard a new executive. In a virtual world, it includes setting up and facilitating critical business meetings, briefings, workshops, and one-on-ones within the first days and weeks. Dedicated time must be set aside for existing leaders to walk a new executive through the company's business model, organizational culture, and strategic plans. Engaging the new hire with the company culture is also a key component – particularly when the in-person, social element is lacking.

With most companies only weeks away from re-opening, we view the virtual onboarding as a first step which is then supplemented with in-person interaction once the company returns to the workplace.

Recruiting and Hiring Executives in a Virtual Environment

Ultimately, the need for talented leaders is growing in the current circumstances. The pandemic has created many challenges for organizations, but recruiting and hiring can be executed despite the remote environment. In some ways, it is easier to reach the best candidates.

At Slayton Search Partners, we've been involved in many new searches, and have been pleased to see placements take place despite the virtual difficulties.

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