

What's the Best Way to Conduct a Global Search?

When businesses seek to hire the right global executive for a key management position, the stakes are high and the recruitment process is complex. Yet time is often of the essence, whether because of pressing corporate goals or inevitable competition for the best candidates. Recently involved together in a successful global search, three leading executives offer guidance to companies and candidates alike.

Hedwig “Hedy” Whitney, Senior Vice President, Human Resources, AspenTech in Burlington, MA

“Success starts right at the beginning, with a clear definition of what type of person the company is seeking in terms of prior experience and capabilities. There needs to be consensus about the ‘must have’ vs. ‘nice to have’ attributes that are key for success in the position. That might seem simple, but it is amazing how often companies don’t pin this down or get agreement from relevant stakeholders before going to the market.

AspenTech is a leading provider of process optimization software and services, which enable manufacturers to reduce costs, increase capacity, and optimize operational performance. As head of HR, it is my goal to help the company recruit and retain top-quality talent. One way I do this is by clearly articulating requirements for each executive search and then getting key stakeholders to sign on. You do not want to initiate a search and then later have a disconnect about whether a particular background is needed. I also try to keep stakeholders motivated and committed to moving ahead in a timely fashion. Companies must be ‘purposeful’ in the search, since attractive candidates are usually very busy and time is often of the essence.

I cannot stress enough how important it is to have the right chemistry between the lead search professional and the person inside the company who is ultimately responsible for the hiring decision. When both parties share a deep understanding, confidence, and ability to communicate extremely effectively, global searches proceed more smoothly and resulting hires are more successful.”



Hedwig “Hedy” Whitney

Paul Taylor, Senior Vice President, Europe, the Middle East, and Africa (EMEA), AspenTech in Reading, U.K.

“I’ve been involved in global searches from both perspectives—as an executive doing the hiring and as a candidate, having been hired by AspenTech earlier this year. So I understand that this is frequently, and perhaps unavoidably, a slow process.

That said, companies and candidates have two different perspectives on time. When you’re doing the hiring and you’re busy with other responsibilities as well, two or three weeks are over in the blink of an eye. Yet if you’re the candidate, that might seem like an eternity. The right search firm can play a big role in mitigating the differences in these two perspectives.

The best search firms also work hard with both candidates and clients to establish interest, explore availabilities, set up time frames, and above all, communicate at every step. Companies need to take their time, of course, to make the right decision. But when a candidate embarks upon this process, especially for a senior executive position, there’s a desire to believe that this role will be critically important. If the search drags on, seemingly indefinitely, the candidate might rightly ask: Why should I consider this position and this company?”



Paul Taylor

Debra Germaine, Partner, Technology, Media and Telecom Practice, CTPartners in Boston, MA

“One reason why the search to fill AspenTech’s Senior Vice President EMEA position was so successful was that the company was adept at working with us as a true business partner. Given the clarity that Hedy Whitney and her colleagues brought to this search, and the level of communication between AspenTech and CTPartners, we were able to achieve the ultimate goal in any global search: to enter the marketplace as the company’s representative, understanding exactly what kind of person was needed.

But, stepping back a moment, it’s worth pointing out that there’s an interesting dichotomy in any global recruitment effort. Search firms must have one foot planted in the door of their client company and one with the candidate, performing multiple roles that keep this process moving along.

Communication is a good example. A search consultant should keep a company current on real-time marketplace examples that are relevant to the search by industry, region, or function. Surprises can slow down decision making. Likewise, consultants should keep candidates informed about developments on the client’s end. I’ll report on new customer relationships, product developments, charitable commitments, and more. That information helps keep candidates motivated.” ■



Debra Germaine