



# Don't call us...

Hiring top executives needs to be taken seriously. Hiring the right person can transform can be costly and hugely damaging to the company, the workforce and your future plans.

your business for the good while getting it wrong  
Amy Leonard finds out how to hire properly.

## Hiring senior executives is never an easy task.

Because they are going to be the key people in your company, driving your business, helping it to grow and steering it into the future, getting the right person is key.

Filling such positions can be an onerous job, but one in which great care needs to be taken. In some cases, there may be people in the business who can step up and take on the responsibility, saving time and resources searching for the right candidate.

But what if your situation is different? Where does the process begin? A good start is advice from some of the people that have been there and done it.

Cathal Geoghegan is the Managing Director of Mount Charles. The company was started in 1988 by Chairman Trevor Annon and is now one of Ireland's largest locally owned companies. What began as a contract catering business has grown enormously, and the group now employs nearly 2,000 local people and delivers a full range of business support solutions.

In the past year alone the company has appointed a number of new senior executives and Cathal has taken differing approaches each time.

"For the senior level vacancies I've had to use two or three different processes. Of the senior team that I have at this moment in time, two have come through the ranks by means of promotion through the business, one through the national press and one through a recruiter."

He stresses that when it comes to selecting the correct person for the role, it is very often the attributes of the individual themselves that are the deciding factor.

"Personality and fit at a senior level is vitally important to me. I feel that getting the right fit in terms of individual is just as important as getting an individual that actually has the skill set and knowledge base to carry out the duties because effectively anybody that's coming for a job at a senior level should have that knowledge base." >



## EXECUTIVE SEARCH & RECRUITMENT

During his most recent recruitment processes, before the official interview processes, he went for coffee meetings with people.

"I wanted to engage with them outside of a core interview process just to get under the bonnet of the individual. I weeded an awful lot of people out at that stage before going through to direct interview process. It saves time for both."

Cathal also said the days of one-way interrogations are gone and that interviews now have to be a two-way dialogue piece.

"It's vitally important to sell yourself to the candidates I believe, as well as the candidates selling themselves to the company. In my case, with my two recent additions to the senior executive staff, it was important that I was prepared.



"I put myself in their shoes, thought of questions I would pose if I was being interviewed, so I had those answers prepared in advance. I was fully versed in terms of what the candidates want to hear. It just helps make sure that when that candidate is selected that they are going to accept the role."

Gary O'Hagan, Chief Operating Officer at James Leckey Design, echoes the value Cathal places on individual fit.

"At that level most of the people are going to have the technical competency, they're going to be able to do the job, so it is about fit and impact and their ability to get on with the rest of the senior team."

Leckey, established in 1983, is an internationally-acclaimed force in the research, design and development of clinically focussed, postural support products for the disabled. Gary uses their set company values

as an essential guide when selecting new senior team members.

"Any employees we have are measured against their objectives, their technical ability to do the job and also their values and personality. It's the fit, the cultural fit within the company. If they don't share those values and can't agree with them then it's not going to work out."

The company's human resources manager Beverley Copeland said that in order to make sure there is a good fit any candidate must be well informed about the company itself, hence why they provide a very detailed application pack that gives all the specifics and a much wider view on the company.

"A job description and a personal specification is not enough when you're hiring a senior executive. They need to know what the organisation is like culturally, they need to know the objectives of the organisation going ahead, they need to be attracted to the role, so just a brief spec doesn't cut it for senior executives, they need more."

Both also agree that it's important to learn as much about the candidate as possible, key to which is looking at them in multiple ways. "We look at them formally and informally" said Beverley.

"For our interview process we try and involve as many people as we can. Our most recent experience we had six internal people at a range of different levels look at that person, right from an engineer to sales, all of whom give feedback into the recruitment process."

Potential candidates are taken on a factory tour as part of the process and Gary said even that helps.

"It's just a tour, but whoever takes the tour has an hour with the candidate, talking to them and we will sit down with them afterwards and ask their thoughts."

Peter Morrow, founder and Managing Director of Morrow Communications, agrees that the formal setting doesn't always reveal enough.

"Interviews are only partially effective. Sometimes the people who sell it best in the

interview are not the best performers and vice versa."

He reiterates the recurring theme of the individual themselves. "You need to be clear in your own mind what you're looking for, what attributes are important to you, and be very probing when the time comes."

"Integrity, leadership, professionalism; commercial awareness is extremely important. And a sense of humour, you definitely need one of those."

Linda Brown, the Director of the Institute of Directors (IoD) Northern Ireland, said: "Senior executives have a leadership role; they need to be able to drive change, think and plan ahead, developing a clear vision and enthuse others within the business to adapt to change."



"The IoD believes that senior executives, need to understand what good governance looks like and how the role and the responsibilities of a director differs from the role of management. A director must be willing to challenge any decisions being discussed by the Board if they think something isn't in the best interests of the company.

"Personal and communication skills are key for any director, allowing them to listen to and take on board the views of others, and vocalise their own views coherently. Understanding complex information, including financial information and situations, as well as being willing to modify their position when presented with new information, is crucial."

So whilst anyone applying for a senior executive will probably have the right skillset on paper, it seems the person themselves is the most important factor. ■