



The Right Fits in a Successful Search

John Reid, Senior Consultant
The Reid Group

One of the most important decisions governing boards make is the selection of major leaders of an organization. This is also true for leaders choosing department heads or principals choosing teachers. Conversely, the poor selection of an individual unable to provide the necessary leadership wastes energy, momentum and capacity for an organization.

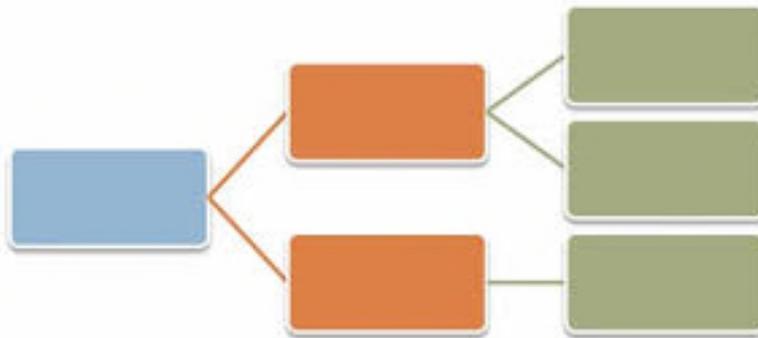
In short, strong, effective and collaborative leadership matters.

In the last 20 years, The Reid Group has served as search consultant for college presidents, national organizational leaders, health care leaders, development directors and chief financial officers. Based on our experience, we have developed critical strategies that result in the selection and successful orientation of leaders to serve their organizations and fulfill their mission.

Finding the “right fits” in the search process is crucial if the investment of time and money is to be worth it. The future sustainability of the organization is literally at stake.

Fit #1: Candidate with the organization

It is essential that the organization’s mission, values and vision be understood and affirmed by the finalist candidates and, in the end, by the chosen candidate. Every



organization has its own culture—“the way we do things around here.” Gaining an understanding of that culture involves an appreciation of the organization’s history, the legacy of past leaders, and the most important traditions that have formed or shaped the organization.

One way to learn about an organization's culture is to talk with former leaders. This can lead to an appreciation of their leadership style and ways of operating, including the relationship between the leader and the governing board or between the leaders and department heads.

Another important way to understand an organization's culture is to focus on how it operates during major times of change or conflict as well as how it deals with success and struggles. This information can be gained from face to face conversations with leaders and employees and through review of important organization publications.

Fit #2: Candidate with the position

Determining the extent of this second fit starts with a clear and well-written job description. The job description allows the organization to identify both key responsibilities and also the criteria by which the performance of those responsibilities are evaluated. In reality, every search process is a two-way process: the organization evaluates the fit of each candidate while the candidates assess their background and skills to determine their ability to meet and exceed the expectations in the job description.

When appropriate, determining an appropriate fit with the position can best be clarified through conversations with the incumbent in the position and with those who will make up the work team. Since candidates are never more influential in a search process than just before they say yes to a new position, it is worth the time and effort to find out as much as possible about this second fit being a good one—or not.

Fit #3: Candidate with the work environment or work team

Even if a given candidate is a good fit with the organization and the position, this third "fit" is critical. The candidate's success will be at risk if he or she can't work well in a given environment or with a specific team.

One way to focus on this is to have a representative group of staff members participate in the interview process. This provides input from those already committed to the organization on a daily or regular basis and can influence and inform the search committee, while at the same time not having potential supervisees hire their new boss. While we acknowledge that a cover letter, resume and references can offer important information, the best way to gain insight into the candidate is through a creative and meaningful face-to-face interview, preferably in the place where the work takes place.

In a recent search process, the staff met with the search committee and search consultants for a day in conversations that led to a final job description. A representative group of staff members were also invited by the search committee to participate in the finalist interviews and to offer their feedback on the strengths and challenges of each candidate. This input was very helpful to the search committee as one important part of their final discernment process.



Once the final interviews are finished and the reference checks have been completed, the search committee must once again consider the three fits—with the organization, with the position and with the work team. Search committee members take all the information they have on each candidate and apply it to what the organization needs most at this time and how well each candidate measures up to the “right fits.” No one candidate will score perfectly in each area. The search committee is looking not for the “perfect fit” but for the best fit at this point in time.

If there are no “best fits,” the committee weighs the pros and cons of selecting the candidate that comes closest. However, we never advise our clients to “settle” on a candidate just to end the search. Rather, sometimes it is necessary to start the search process over—because nothing less than the future of the organization is at stake.

Once a final decision is made, the search committee will also need to clarify:

1. The exact package of compensation and benefits the candidate will be offered;
2. The agreed-on starting date;
3. An orientation process to help the new leader be successful during the transition period.

The last task of the search committee members is to evaluate the search process—how well they did at each step, what they learned and which things they might do differently in the future.

A leadership search process represents an investment in the future of an organization. A successful search using the three fits described above is a wise investment.

John Reid is a Partner and Senior Consultant with The Reid Group, a national consulting firm providing services in Executive Search, Leadership Development, Strategic Planning, and Conflict Management to nonprofit and faith-based organizations.

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