

Executive Recruitment and Gender Equity

Winning diverse talent in 2010

by *Tim McIntyre, for Yahoo! HotJobs*

Striving for a level playing field is an important effort for a number of reasons. By now you have likely heard the business case for gender diversity—facts like:

- Women are responsible for trillions of dollars in purchasing each year (and you need a range of viewpoints on staff, so you can build market share).
- Female bosses rate higher as effective leaders (and you need the most-effective leaders).*
- A five-year study concluded that women rate higher than their male counterparts in 17 out of 21 skill areas (and you want the best people on the job).*

I find these facts all the more compelling because I have two teenage daughters. Like any parent, I want the best for them. It seems to me that they should not be passed over for the wrong reasons—but neither should they be hired for the wrong reasons. I want them see them—and all qualified women—getting an equal shot.

What does it take to give women an equal shot at your opening?

Someone must actively manage an executive search to ensure that female executives are adequately represented in the pool of candidates to be interviewed.

For example, if only one woman is among several people to be interviewed, that's not a level playing field. If women are underrepresented, your organization is at risk of missing out on the best talent (and having it get snapped up by a competitor).

So at the start of any executive search, you want to build a detailed profile of the candidates you're seeking and draw up an initial list of potential candidates that is neither too big nor too small.

Especially in the case of a search for a mid- to senior-level executive, you're seeking a specific sort of leader with a rare skill set. Ensuring that the target list is big enough requires that everyone—of either gender—is considered.

This talent pool is important because the next step is to bounce the search off of select targets. By analyzing people's reactions, you can gain a sense for how appealing the opportunity is, and how easy or hard it will be to find just the right fit.

During talent acquisition, it's critical to always adhere to the “best person wins the job” philosophy. That means every stakeholder is committed to having every qualified individual on equal footing—whether or not they have the same hobbies, interests, or gender as others in leadership positions.

You can “recruit” internally, too. Organize leadership, or affinity groups, for example, so staff members can see female executives taking risks, doing great work, and building your competitive edge.

If you lack time or a network of candidates, consider using a boutique executive search firm to optimize your search and selection. That way, you can target hires at the middle-management level and groom potential candidates for success by investing in their development.

By securing the services of a dedicated professional resource, companies can leverage diversity in key executive appointments, and sharpen their competitive edge in the global marketplace.

How do you foster gender diversity—what works for you? Or what doesn't work, and is a challenge? Email me at Ask@MySearchGroup.com.

Tim McIntyre is president and CEO of The Executive Search Group, LLC, which is the only retained executive search firm that can help you Hire with Certainty, risk free.

*Source: Catalyst's study "The Bottom Line: Connecting Corporate Performance and Gender Diversity."