

## I I.

### THE SEARCH CONSULTANTS - THE HEAD HUNTERS

#### GENERAL REFLECTIONS

Normally you would ask a Search Consultant to tell what this job is all about. As it is me writing this book, you must settle for getting this told by me, the Researcher point of view if you like. There is a lot the Search Consultant does when the Researcher is not necessarily present, like, yearly strategy reviews, budgeting, resourcing, business planning, sales development, interviewing Candidates, Client reporting.

At the beginning of my career when I was still a Search Consultant, before moving over to research, I was also involved in these matters. However, those faded far-off memories are not anymore in tune with how things are done today. Much has changed, so if you want to have a detailed update about the issues mentioned above, you must talk to a Search Consultant.

The starting point is that without the Search Consultants there would be no Executive Search Firm in the first place. Without them, there would be no Executive Search Industry, without them, I would never have made my career. So, at least from my point of view, a rather significant group of people wouldn't you say? That's why I want to say a few words about them here.

When hearing the words Executive Search or Head Hunter, most people prick up their ears and listen. A Head Hunter is something most people have heard of, but few have had anything to do with.

Head Hunter sounds exciting, mysterious, thrilling, like something involving the crème de la crème of the business world, like something that only happens in the upper echelons of major high-end companies and boardrooms. Well, sometimes it may be like this, often also not.

When searching for top-level senior executive leadership solutions to major global high-end companies, the job of a Head Hunter is indeed very challenging, complex, diverse, arduous and demanding. The job can be very inspiring, motivating and also very rewarding when you have had a good day's work. When you have completed a very demanding Search Assignment, you can honestly say you made a difference.

It is also a job full of routines, long working hours, of moments when you feel you have done everything you can without getting there, full of stressful days and of tight timetables, so it indeed is no bed of roses, if that's what somebody thinks.

That said, the job of a Head Hunter has got to be one of the most interesting jobs there is on planet Earth. You can keep up to date with the business world in real time. You work with top business leaders from all kinds of industries. You meet visionary, charismatic business leaders. By finding the right top-level leadership solutions for your Clients, you most certainly have an impact on their company.

The impact the Head Hunter has in the business world is both important and significant. At best, he/she becomes a confidante of the Client, a trusted person who is consulted for advice on important business matters. If that is not making a difference, I don't know what is. One cannot get any closer to the upper executive management and the boardroom of a company without actually working there. A top-level Search Consultant has the privilege of doing this all through the business world.

#### **THE MAKINGS OF A HEAD HUNTER**

What does a Search Consultant look like? There is no magic formula for this. Not everyone can become a Search Consultant, not by far. For a start, you need a good education, a specific professional skill set and a certain mindset. You also need business experience and excellent business acumen.

You need tenacity, willpower and an ability to solve and overcome any challenge you may encounter during a Search Assignment. Above all, a top-level Search Consultant must have the integrity and the strive for Excellence at the highest possible level.

In a nutshell, you must have all the ingredients it takes to become a successful businessman, and you must have a successful proven track record. There is no absolute must career history. The Search Consultant can come from almost any line of business.

Indeed, many Search Consultants have multi-industry experience. Many have international experience. Many have experience of leading bigger organisations, sometimes hundreds of people, sometimes even thousands of people. This business experience is an important asset to the Search Consultant when working with his/her Clients. It is hard to develop into a trusted advisor for senior-level executives without having some business experience.

Neither is there a must have functional background required. A career within, e.g. sales, marketing, finance, purchasing, operations & manufacturing, HR, may all qualify equally well.

However, regardless of the background, it takes time and experience to develop into a top-level Search Consultant. Nothing happens overnight. It takes years and years and hundreds of completed Search Assignments. So, we are not talking about one or two years, more like ten years, even more, and this is assuming you already have an ample and successful business experience behind you before becoming a top-level Search Consultant.

Anybody can start an Executive Search Firm and say they are top-level Search Consultants. Pay attention. Just because someone says so, does not mean this is the case.

Here I would like to repeat some of what I already said before: *Any top search professional also needs experience, a lot of it, both life experience and business experience. Top search professionals almost categorically have an extensive and successful business career behind them before joining the Executive Search Industry.*

*This is not to say that also a top-talented 30-year-old Search Consultant couldn't be good in his/her work, but when talking about advising senior-level executives in billion dollar globally operating enterprises, the saying "been there, done that", gets a deeper meaning. The personal business experience and perspective, "I have been there too", gives credibility and weight to your opinions and advice and enables you to understand your Client's needs so much better.*

The Search Consultant must be a person with excellent social and communications skills. A person who likes working in the customer interface. He/she must be self-assured and convincing. When working in a Search Firm, selling a product called Executive Search, ultimately the main product the Search Consultant is selling is him/herself, his/her reputation, his/her integrity. It is the Search Consultant as a person who the Client puts his/her trust in. It is the Search Consultant as a person that becomes the Client's Business Partner. It is the Search Consultant the Client calls for advice. There is one more important must have needed, and that is the love for the job.

### **HOW DO YOU BECOME A HEAD HUNTER?**

Nobody is destined to become a Head Hunter at birth. Few think about a career in Executive Search when they graduate and take their first steps into the business world.

However, successful business people tend to come in contact with Executive Search sooner or later, during their career, as Clients or as Candidates or they read or hear about it.

Some become genuinely interested in the Executive Search Industry and then one day, they become Head Hunters. Quite a few of the Search Consultants, would you believe it, are Head Hunted into the industry. Not so surprising after all, considering what kind of business we are talking about, is it?

Most have some prior understanding of the job, but they don't know what happens behind the curtains, and a lot is happening. You must first learn all the secrets of the trade before becoming an expert. For that to happen, it takes both time and experience.

Not all people who become Search Consultants, make it. Not necessarily because they don't have the potential, but because they miss being the "*Captain of the boat*". Coming from the business world, they may be used to leading bigger organisations, delegating things and having vast resources at their disposal. In an Executive Search Firm, you only lead a small team, maybe a few Researchers and your PA. The most important person you must lead is yourself. Here it is you who must do things, and you cannot delegate your work to others.

People who miss being the "*Captain of the boat*" too much, sooner or later, tend to return to the business world, where they feel more at home leading bigger organisations and businesses.

### **THE SEARCH CONSULTANTS/THE PARTNERS AND THE RESEARCH FUNCTION**

For us Researchers, the Search Consultants are invaluable. Without them, the research function would not even exist. When the Partners define the company strategy, the company values, the company business critical parameters and the goals, this has a significant impact on everything, also on the research function, so everything starts from the Search Consultants/the Partners.

All high-end Search Firms see the Research Function as a factor of strategic importance. This high appreciation of the Research directly translates into what the Research Func-

tion will look like, what kind of Researchers they hire, how they invest in Research, how they develop the Research.

In a high-end Search Firm, the Research Function gets all the attention, appreciation, resources and guidance it needs. This way the Research Function can develop into a world-class research operation. As team members of the search team, the Search Consultants are also an essential part of the everyday research work. Their advice, opinions, ideas and support are invaluable for the research, and the Search Consultant/Researcher task team is a team that can conquer any challenge.

#### **THE REST OF THE JOB**

You might remember me previously saying something about other tasks relating to the job description of a Search Consultant/Partner like yearly strategy reviews, budgeting, resourcing, business planning, sales development, interviewing Candidates, Client reporting.

I am not going to go through these subjects in any greater detail, because, I have not been present during these actions, neither am I a top-expert in these subjects, but a top-expert in research. Still, I know enough about these subjects to understand and appreciate what is being done by the Search Consultants. As a Research Manager, I more than well understand the magnitude and the importance of all this work done here and how it directly affects the research function and enables us, the Researchers, to do our job the best way we know how.

Managing a high-end Search Firm is no easy task. It requires a clear strategic vision and clarity, excellent business skills, excellent management skills, perseverance and as said before, a great love for the job, in other words, all the trademarks of a top-level Executive Search professional. Having had the opportunity to develop into a top-level Researcher during all these years working together with so many fantastic Search Consultants, has given me an insight into what top-level search professionals look like.