

Balancing equality and diversity in management

Diversity and equal opportunity issues are becoming more and more important to businesses worldwide. Discussions about how to achieve the optimal ratio of representation in the boardroom, in management or within the whole company are on top of the agenda of many leaders of companies.

At present, it is very common to employ diversity managers to manage the broad and complex issues, and in some companies they even call them Equality & Diversity Managers. Now, managing equality and diversity along with the issue of non-discrimination is a real challenge. To be straightforward, I do not want to go into argumentation over affirmative action and pros and cons of this issue. For now, I will leave that to politicians and interest groups.

Diversity - a demographically representative workforce and sensitivity to different cultures - is an important goal in the search and hiring process.

But what I want to discuss is the issue of how retained executive search firms tackle the subject of helping their clients to achieve the desired diversity within their leadership and management teams. Especially, when it is a subject to legal scrutiny and requires careful consideration of the means that can be used in the search process.

Ultimately, each aspect of the search process deserves careful review and consideration of

how to assure equal opportunity without engaging in unlawful discrimination.

AESC sets the standard

The Association of Executive Search Consultants (AESC), the most renowned and respected organization in the executive search industry that associates executive search companies that adhere to the highest ethical principles of professional conduct, provides general guidelines on how to deal with the issue. It states that relationships with retained executive search firms should be characterized by honesty, objectivity, accuracy and respect for confidentiality. One of the core values of AESC and its members is also to promote equal opportunity in employment. Diversity – a demographically representative workforce and sensitivity to different cultures – is not simply a truism, but an important goal, first in the search process and then in the hiring process. As a consequence, AESC has been committed to advancing this goal through its members. To support members in this, the AESC has established the Diversity Resource Center to help member firms promote equal opportunity in employment and present diverse candidates to their client hiring organizations.

Candidate's Bill of Rights

The equal opportunities issue is also embraced through the Candidate's Bill of Rights as it is believed that the most successful

executive searches involve a three way partnership, whereby the candidate, the search firm and the client fully understand their rights, duties and obligations to each other during the search process.

Candidates are entitled to confidentiality, full disclosure of information, professional treatment, regular feedback and enough time for making the decision.

The relationship between search firm and clients is commonly discussed. But the relationship between search firm and the candidates is just as important. And it is a pity that many personal services providers underestimate how important it is, especially taking into consideration the more and more intensive issue of scarcity of talent.

The professional executive search firms approach the candidates without any biases, irrelevant of communities or minorities they might belong to. It is a matter of professional pride to let the candidates know that they have certain rights towards the search firm and they can insist on being treated professionally. So what are the rights of

any candidate in dealing with a search firm?

First of all, candidates are entitled to the highest level of confidentiality from both the search firm and their client. They also have the right to the full disclosure of any available information about the search firm and client organization, so they can make sound decisions and be sure that there is no hidden agenda. Being entitled to professional treatment, to receive regular feedback and enough time for making the final decisions are natural to high-quality search professionals. On top of that, they respect the time and position of a candidate who should receive consistent information from the search firm and their client. Respecting these principles in relation to the candidate guarantees that the rights of the candidate have not been neglected.

Search firm a tool of diversity management

Any employer who cares about the diversity and equal opportunity issues cooperates with a search firm that understands the importance of the issue and who can truly represent them in front of the candidates. The image of search firm hired adds to the image of a company that hired them to do the search. Respect for the rights of candidates and approaching them with respect to the equal opportunity rule are the marks of the high professionalism in the search industry. Having such a consultant by your side means having one big tool to manage equality and diversity more effectively.



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