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REPLY to WORKING QUESTIONS from Joseph Daniel McCool Editor in Chief – Executive Recruiter News

by Jana Hyžová

The main topic of your talk show in Bratislava will be "***The End of Executive Search Consulting and Management Succession As We Know It.***"

How would you describe the main issues of the spoken change in this business? Will it influence the core of Executive Search service, or will it change the methodology, rules, way of communication and ethical code etc.?

The key words in the title of my presentation are "As We Know It." There is a lot of dysfunction in executive management succession in countries around the world, big and small, even here in Slovakia, so my remarks in Bratislava will focus on the challenges of executive hiring, the human capital issues organizations should consider before they make plans for succession and the perspective that outstanding executive search consultants can and should bring to the process. I believe the executive search consulting business needs to evolve to adapt to the changing demands of the global economy and that means examining professional practices, fees, measuring outcomes and otherwise performing consistently for client organizations.

What will be changed from the candidate's point of view? Will this new „era“ bring them new opportunities and benefits or increased the requirements on those who want to be successful on the senior management job market?

The business of executive search consulting really is an outgrowth of the management consulting business. But I believe while it may rank as the single most important professional service engaged by organizations, it also ranks among the most misunderstood. That's partly because of how many candidates have viewed the process. Sometimes, executive search consultants simply avoid delivering the bad news to a candidate who came close but who wasn't ultimately picked for the job. But the best executive search consultants recognize that today's candidate may be the candidate or the client on a future search, so they always treat the candidate with the utmost respect and courtesy. I believe the future will bring some changes for executive-level job candidates, and just one of them which is gaining momentum is the process of "onboarding," in which a newly hired executive is given some coaching, some early feedback and other support so they can identify an early win – one they might achieve in their first 100 days on the job - that will set the tempo and expectations for their leadership in the years to come.

What has to be done by the Executive Search firms in the new business environment, to become more benefiting partner for their clients in area of hiring their senior or top executive leaders or talents?

I believe there's a lot that executive search consulting firms can do to help their clients sort through the organizational and talent market issues that must be addressed if an organization really wants to differentiate by seizing a human capital advantage over the competition. Hiring top talent away from the competition strengthens one organization and weakens another, so it's serious business. I believe executive search firms have to offer global reach, as well as a local, regional and global perspective on their clients' markets, and I believe they have to be a true partner to the hiring organization. That is, executive search consultants have to bring more insight, more perspective and frankly, more science and analysis to their work, so they can build some evidence that would substantiate each executive hire. I think search firms have to be flexible, representative of the makeup of their client organizations, responsive and unafraid to share difficult messages with their clients. I think a lot of professional service providers are hesitant to share the bad news with clients, and if the client doesn't probe for answers, the issue continues to fester. Smart clients of executive search consultants understand that, like a marriage, you have to take the bad news, occasionally, along with the good. So long as both parties are working to advance the interests of the company, there will be a good partnership.

What changes do you expect from the clients point of view? How important will be the Executive Search consulting for them? Do you think that their demand for this kind of services will increase or decrease in comparison to present time? What benefits are the executive search firms able to bring them in the competition battle?

Let's face the reality. Much of the reason why organizations in Slovakia, Central and Eastern Europe and beyond are so dependent on external talent – and yes, executive search consultants – is that they've failed to develop executive talent from within. I believe executive search consulting activity will increase above the demands of today's global economy, but in a perfect world, hiring organizations wouldn't need such outside consultants because they would recruit, develop and promote the best of their own hires. The executive search consulting firm succeeds only by tapping an ever-growing network of professional contacts, studying the markets, identifying leaders and potential corporate leaders, and by understanding the human and social dynamics that would move a talented individual to move from a comfortable position into a new workplace environment. They do this behind the scenes, and with much discretion, as executive management succession often requires.

What do you see as the main differences in Executive search consulting between European and US (North American) market? What or who are the key factors determining the international trends in this business?

The American market for executive search consulting, which is the oldest and largest in the world, in my opinion, doesn't offer a perfect model for Europe, Slovakia and the world beyond Bratislava to follow. I believe that multinational hiring organizations are generally more satisfied with the work of executive search firms in Europe than those in the United States, for a few reasons. First, the European market never grew at the same frenetic and frenzied pace as the American market, so I believe that kept more European firms focused on delivering consistently for their clients. Second, I believe that while executive search consulting is both an art and a science, I have learned that European firms have taken the science of executive search – like the psychometric testing and evaluation of executive job candidates – more seriously than their American counterparts, who have relied more on “gut feel” or intuition about whether a certain candidate is right for the job.

Do you perceive the central and eastern Europe region, where also Slovakia belongs, somehow specific or challenging?

I think Slovakia and the whole of Central and Eastern Europe are waking up to so many new opportunities for the growth of their economies, institutional and social reform, and international trade. But government policies and regulations will continue to shape the European Union and the business affairs in its member countries, and that's not all good. The EU needs to be nimble in its politics, its trade, and its development of intellectual capital and human capital if it's going to compete in a global market that increasingly demands flexibility, good timing and the right people to tackle any problem.

Many Slovaks after opening the border built their career abroad; many are also in the States. How much important do you think is the culture background in achieving one's success abroad?

I believe that executives from Slovakia and all across Europe will have a distinct advantage over their American counterparts in the global executive talent market of the near future. Not only will American companies demand that their executives speak more than just English and have experience working outside of the United States, but they'll also require a cultural sensitivity that is already baked into the lives of many in Europe, but which must be trained and taught in the United States. I believe we'll see more Slovaks heading U.S.-based companies in the future, and of course, demand for the brightest among them who have been working and gaining experience in America and other countries will be high among those companies here in Slovakia who want to hire the best talent.

What do you think are now the key priorities for an individual who wants to achieve ambitious goals in his professional career?

First, I think you have to work for and with a real leader, someone who exposes you to learning opportunities and allows you to pursue your career and professional interests while also mentoring you and provide advice and feedback on your performance. I think an attitude of lifelong learning is also a great thing to have as one tries to climb the corporate ladder. But you have to be visible and gain a reputation for hard work inside and outside your company. I believe that networking with other business people is important. And I believe advanced educational credentials are also gaining in importance, which gets me back to the issue of lifelong learning and the realization that the more we know, the more we know how little we know about our world.

Could you remember your first contact with executive search? What was your way, which led you to your present role of the world's most widely quoted analyst of the global Executive Search consulting business?

I was a news correspondent for American newspapers and radio before I transitioned to a focus on executive recruitment, so I got the chance to interview business leaders, presidential candidates, and government officials about their views on business, politics, and social issues. That was a real education, but nothing like the education I've received from interviewing executive search consultants and corporate executives who engage and manage their companies relationships with executive recruiters.

What do you find most fascinating on this business?

What I find fascinating is the fact that executive search consulting is such a critical professional service, and its outcomes impact millions of shareholders, employees and service and supply vendors around the world, but yet it's still very much misunderstood. Part of the blame must be placed on executive recruiters themselves, but I think also that hiring organizations and even candidates have contributed to the confusion around the

differences, for example, between lower-management headhunters – who work in a transactional mode – and high-level executive search consultants, who really are strategic partners and resources to their clients. A Dutch consultant once described his job as that of a “heart-hunter,” not a “head-hunter,” and I think he was right. Executive search consulting impacts many lives, not only the executive who is making a career move, but also the people who will report to him or her and the executive’s family, if they have one. So I respect a serious, thoughtful and considerate approach to this business of heart-hunting. After all, consultants are paid to identify what really motivates candidates, and during the interview process, they try to look into candidates’ hearts and souls. If they find something genuine, passionate and honest, that’s usually a good indicator that they should be given some consideration for the job.

Where do you see yourself in 5 to 10 years period? What do you do to achieve your personal goals?

I’ve taken up somewhat of a personal mission to help executive search firms and their clients get to know each other better, work better together and learn to take risks together. Those are, in my opinion, some of the key elements of a true business partnership, or any relationship, really. So I believe there’s still a lot of work to do, especially as business communities in Eastern Europe and in places like mainland China and India start to engage executive search firms and being to build their own human capital. I will continue to gather up global, regional and local perspectives on best practices in executive recruiting. I think I’ll be smarter and wiser when I next return to Bratislava, and I believe I’ll come back to a city that will really be on the move.

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Koniec poradenstva v Executive Search a vo vyhľadávaní a výbere manažérov v ich súčasnej podobe
The End of Executive Search Consulting and Management Succession As We Know It

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