



Working With Executive Recruiters When Your Goal Is the CEO Suite

By Sarah E. Needleman

CareerJournal.com spoke to Stephen Mader, a vice chairman at executive-search firm Christian & Timbers, about tips for would-be CEOs on working with executive recruiters. Based in Boston, Mr. Mader places top executives, including chief executive officers and board directors, at companies nationwide and has completed more than 400 executive-level searches in a range of industries. He had been the firm's CEO from 1999 to 2004.

- **How do your most successful relationships with CEO candidates begin?**

The bulk of the time they are made by an exploratory phone call. A recruiter thinks a person could be a plausible candidate for a search, so he or she makes that first contact. It happens more that way than any other by far.

Sometimes we meet because the candidate had hired me in the past to conduct a search for them. Other times, it's because they're a member of a board of directors where I am doing work.

- **How do you prefer to be contacted by CEO candidates?**

I prefer that they email me an explanatory note about their objectives and attach a resume or biography that tells me about their background. Phone calls are fine, but email is better because you can get more information across to me faster.

- **What's the most important qualification you want to see on the resume of a CEO candidate?**

I want to see that they have run a significant profit-and-loss operation and that they have measurable achievements as leaders. I want to see that they have created significant change in an organization's approach to business and the results that followed.

- **What's the best way for executives eyeing the corner office to get that qualification?**

You've got to earn that inside an organization, and you don't get those big jumps in responsibility by changing employers. If you work diligently and successfully in one organization, you get to know it well enough to make an investment in its growth and development.

- **What is lacking in most executive candidates who aspire to CEO jobs?**

A complete breadth of functional responsibilities from finance, to product development, to marketing and sales.

- **How can an executive recruiter help an aspiring CEO with a strategic plan for his or her career?**

One of the biggest gaps in the knowledge space is with governance -- the board of directors' side of the business. A recruiter can help you get on a board of directors, which is critical for landing a CEO job, because directors want CEO candidates with boardroom experience. Recruiters also can be great interview coaches. They know how to handle interviews and are good coaches.

- **What's your favorite interview question when meeting with CEO candidates?**

What has been the most important phase or moment of your career and why do you think that? A good answer will usually be associated with the person's greatest business achievement.

- **When evaluating CEO candidates of equal or about equal qualifications, what's the most common knockout factor?**

Chemistry. The ability to communicate and connect with the people making the decision. When chemistry doesn't happen, the hiring authority, which in a CEO candidate's case is the board, doesn't feel it really understands the person.

- **What typically sets the one who gets the job apart?**

CEO candidates are judged largely on their sense of personal leadership. The winner in those selections is usually the person in which the board believes most in their ability to lead others, rather than their specific experience.

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