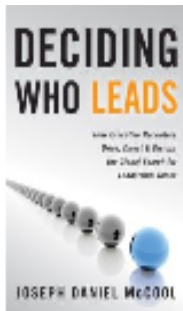




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Book Review: Highlighting the case favoring Boutique Executive Search Firms from a newly published book on Executive Recruiters

Reviewed by Barbara B. Schoenfeld, Managing Director, Saffron LLC



“Deciding Who Leads: How Executive Recruiters Drive, Direct & Disrupt the Global Search for Leadership Talent” by Joseph Daniel McCool (Davies-Black Publishing 2008)

Joseph McCool is an internationally recognized commentator on best practices in executive search. He is a contributor and columnist, and is frequently quoted in publications such as the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Financial Times*. In his book, *“Deciding Who Leads,”* McCool calls executive recruiters **“talent sherpas”**. In other words, we are trusted knowledge leaders who guide clients through the difficult terrain of the global market in the search for leadership talent.

McCool describes executive search consultants as storytellers. He says, “They use their arts of persuasion, social graces, assignment-specific jargon, and people-reading skills to assess candidates’ fit for the role and sell them on the employer’s history, vision and strategy”. (p. 17).

McCool underscores the value of the effective recruiter who can close the deal. In other words, it is not enough to find people who have the credentials to do the job. To be valuable, an executive search consultant must also assess whether a candidate can fit well into the role in the organization AND work with the candidate to help him or her see why the opportunity would be attractive. McCool reminds us that John Sculley, the former executive of PepsiCo was “famously recruited” to be CEO of Apple Computer by Steve Jobs’ challenge: “Do you want to spend the rest of your life selling sugared water or do you want a chance to change the world?” (p. 18). A successful executive search consultant will guide an executive to consider the possibilities and the potential.

Joseph McCool scopes out the type of firm that can best benefit from partnering with an executive search consultant (p. 132). The ideal client:

- regards the recruitment of senior executives as a powerful competitive weapon
- sees the recruiter as a trusted advisor or personal shopper (not a vendor)
- trusts the accuracy of the recruiter’s perceptions about people (and clearly articulates them to the recruiter)

- is open and honest about the shortcomings of the current executive teams and functions
- responds quickly

A poignant observation that McCool makes in bold print is that the size of the search firm does not equate with quality and consistency of search results. (p. 161). Joseph McCool points out that Human Resources executives “...by a very wide margin – say they consistently get better service from small, often specialist ‘boutique’ search firms....” He then goes on to outline the advantages that allow small boutiques to be nimble, focused and effective at delivering service.

As a manager of a small boutique search firm, I find McCool’s words to be wise and well said.

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