



UP NEXT MONTH

The Culture of Engagement and Philanthropy



WHAT MAKES AN EXCEPTIONAL LEADER?

Through its own experience and research, Y Scouts identified the essential behavioral qualities that define top-notch leaders. Nonprofits should seek individuals who:

- **Drive results.** Whatever the functional area, the candidate displays a history of “delivering the goods.”
- **Develop others.** As a leader, the candidate realizes it’s not all about “me” and works to help others reach their full potential.
- **Learn relentlessly.** The candidate has an unbounded sense of curiosity and leans into learning of all sorts — about craft, industry, or even world events.



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The Value of Values-Based Hiring

Setting aside a candidate’s resumé and job description may be the best strategy for nonprofits seeking the perfect hire

by Brian Mohr and Richard Tollefson

► It happens all the time: A candidate with impeccable credentials steps up to a nonprofit leadership position only to step down within a year or so. But why? And why so often?

A number of reasons could be at play — expectations aren’t being met (by employee or employer), co-workers’ work styles clash, the workload is not as expected — but mostly it boils down to *not the right fit*.

Part of the issue is hiring that is focused almost exclusively on a candidate’s skills, with little attention paid to the organization, itself — its purpose, values, culture and leadership — and how the candidate’s belief system aligns in those areas.

But within executive search firms that focus on values alignment, this is precisely the starting point: a deep assessment of the nonprofit. What is the organization about? What does it stand for? What types of people thrive there? What behaviors are rewarded and recognized?

Only when an organization’s culture is fully understood — after meetings and surveys with a wide range of stakeholders — can the search team seek synergies in candidate responses.

While this approach is more time consuming, Clesson Hill, president of Child Crisis Arizona’s board, says it’s time well spent. “It is a choice. Spend time up front or on the back end cleaning up messes.” Child Crisis Arizona engaged Scottsdale-based executive search firm Y Scouts to identify a leader familiar with mergers, who also was passionate about improving the lives of local children and families.

“A volunteer board running this process wouldn’t have had the time to complete such a thorough background on candidates,” says Hill. “We would have just compared the job description to the resumé and made our decision. And as a result, we would have had about 20 percent of the information we needed.”

Resumés and job descriptions are part of the process of



identifying talent, but during the interview they should not be the focus. Instead, ask personal, open-ended questions: Who are you and what do you stand for? If you were to make a career change, what would your motivation be? Is something missing in your career? Are you drawn to a cause? What is most important in your life? What topics occupy your mind? What news articles do you read? In what activities do you participate outside of work?

These non-skills-based questions reveal a candidate’s values, how she operates, and how she might fit with the nonprofit’s culture. Skills shouldn’t be minimized, of course, but if the person is not a good fit for the organization, no amount of skill will compensate for a misalignment of shared values.

“You can put anyone in a seat,” says Ash Hachmeister, Child Crisis Arizona board member. “But there is absolutely nothing more important than getting the *right* person in the seat. It simply takes time.” ■

Search Tactics

Not every organization can afford a search partner; they can, however, apply similar tactics.

Create a search committee. Include board members, leadership and non-leadership employees, the individuals sourcing talent (internal HR or a recruiting firm), and especially stakeholders, whose lives are directly touched by the candidate who fills the position.

Survey the committee. Before a formal meeting, ask: “Hiring the right person will lead to what/where?” “At the end of two years, I would be thrilled if the new leader accomplished [fill in the blank].”

Conduct a strategy session. Begin with the compiled survey results, and be ready to discuss:

- **Why:** Why does this role exist? Are the expectations and success outcomes realistic, specific, measurable, achievable and timely?

- **Who:** What areas of expertise are absolutely necessary for this position? Is a master’s degree essential (what outcome will it support)? Omit unnecessary qualifications. What type of person best fits the nonprofit’s values and organizational culture?

- **Where:** Look beyond job board postings. Brainstorm. Which organizations might currently employ your ideal candidate? Does he work within sub-sectors of the nonprofit world? Is he a member of various professional associations? Actively approach these individuals.

- **How:** Develop recruiting tactics. Does anyone on the committee have access to potential candidates through professional organizations or personal relationships? Who is most skilled at using social media, such as LinkedIn, to cull through professional connections? Who will research niche job boards for potential leads?

