



Your biggest decisions,  
will be your people ones...

10-15 minute read.

# Hiring Senior Execs

## Seven critical differences

1. It's more strategic
2. Key leadership qualities
3. Soundings are critical
4. Requires a more sophisticated approach
5. Greater confidentiality is required
6. Timescales are longer
7. Conclusion

This article is for you if you're new to hiring into senior roles or have limited experience of doing so.

Hiring into senior roles has many nuances and subtle differences from recruiting into regular jobs.

Robert Tearle has recruited and headhunted several hundreds of people at all levels of seniority. In this article, he is sharing with you some of his insights.



# 1. IT'S MORE STRATEGIC

The more senior the hire, the more likely the role will involve shaping the strategy of the business rather than implementing it. It's more about strategic versus tactical objectives.

Remits might include high-impact, long-term initiatives such as buying other companies, pursuing organic growth or selling the business.

CXO and senior management remits are likely to be shaped by a company's long-term goals:

BUY		SELL		GROW
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Individual contributors might focus on short-term objectives such as new sales initiatives, supplier consolidation, improving service outcomes or implementing a more rigid process.

Exec hiring requirements are often heavily shaped by pressing business challenges at the particular time of hiring and the circumstances by which the vacancy has arisen.

The replacement of a top performer who has resigned and whose business was well run often differs from that of someone who's been kicked out for failing to perform and leading a business unit in poor shape.

At different times organisations will face different challenges, and these will shape the hiring requirement e.g.

Accelerated Growth | Crisis | Turnaround | Transformational or Cultural Change

Senior roles are more likely to be focused on multi-year goals, whereas individual contributor roles focus on in-year goals ~ the tactical objectives of what needs to be accomplished in the here and the now.

Consider working both backwards and forwards when brainstorming what you wish someone to accomplish in the role.

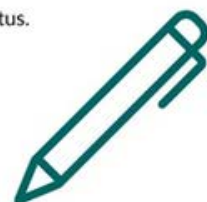
The more senior the role, the greater the ripple effect.

The performance of an organisation depends entirely on the performance of the relevant executive. And the more senior the role, the greater the ripple effect of how that person's performance has an implication throughout their business/business unit and indeed across others.



# Consider your mid to long-term goals

Mid to long term goals		
3 years	5 years	10 years
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• These are the strategic goals of your business or business unit.</li><li>• Quantifiable, perhaps:</li><li>• Profit, revenue, net profit...</li><li>• Market share, market position, market entry/coverage...</li><li>• Branding, reputation, governance...</li><li>• Restructure, acquisition, disposal...</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Consider changes that you can envisage and the unforeseen.</li><li>• And how these may impact what is required of the job holder.</li><li>• What's required in 3, 4 or 5 years time may be different to the first 24 months.</li><li>• Nulla volutpat cursus lectus nec elementum.</li><li>• Maecenas elementum est eu tortor sagittis, non fringilla tellus efficitur.</li><li>• Phasellus eget mollis lectus.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Long term goals are likely to be subject to less definition.</li><li>• However, they should of course shape your short and medium-term ones.</li><li>• Nulla volutpat cursus lectus nec elementum.</li><li>• Maecenas elementum est eu tortor sagittis, non fringilla tellus efficitur.</li><li>• Phasellus eget mollis lectus.</li></ul>



Short to mid term goals		
12 months	24 months	36 months
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• For the majority of even the most senior hires, achieving in year 1 represents success or failure.</li><li>• You do need to consider how quickly someone can impact the business.</li><li>• What needs to be accomplished in the here and the now?</li><li>• Often these will be revenue targets, new market entry, headcount growth or shrinkage.</li><li>• Re-structuring, project management, cost-cutting</li><li>• Increase of customer satisfaction rates..</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What's required in the second or third year may be very different from year 1.</li><li>• You need to think about what your immediate goals and business objectives are, and your mid-long term ones.</li><li>• How do these translate into qualities required of someone?</li><li>• Nulla volutpat cursus lectus nec elementum.</li><li>• Maecenas elementum est eu tortor sagittis, non fringilla tellus efficitur.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Long term goals are likely to be subject to less definition.</li><li>• However, they should of course shape your short and medium-term ones.</li><li>• Nulla volutpat cursus lectus nec elementum.</li><li>• Maecenas elementum est eu tortor sagittis, non fringilla tellus efficitur.</li><li>• Phasellus eget mollis lectus.</li></ul>



The impact of a managerial or leadership hire is often 5 X, 10 x or 100+ X greater than regular ones.

On a practical basis, this ripple effect can be expected to translate into bottom-line business performance, brought about through positive or negative impacts on revenues, costs, profit and ultimately, the return on investment to the business owner/shareholders.

- At senior levels, the impact on business performance can vary by as much as 40%! A successful appointment may positively impact the business by up to 20%, while conversely, a poor one could be minus 20%!
- Leadership style and the values of the leader are crucial.
- You want someone who will be a magnet to attract the best people into your business and inspire your most valued people, your existing high achievers and rising stars.

The larger the company, the greater the ripple effect and the longer it will take for a senior manager or C-suite exec to impact the business.

When deciding on the nature of the job and your hiring challenge, please consider your long-term goals, work out what's required and work your way backs.

NB If they can't perform well at what's required in the current year, the rest is immaterial.

## 2. KEY LEADERSHIP QUALITIES



### **Integrity, responsibility, and emotional intelligence:**

The world has been changing, and investors and business owners are keen to manage and develop their businesses with responsibility. Integrity is high on their agenda. Leaders with high EI are 40% more successful than those with low EI. The ability of senior executives to develop, value and nurture mature relationships to create an effective people network will often 'make or break' their success in the role. Crucial to this ability is emotional intelligence, aka EI.

### **'A' player leadership quality:**

The four 'E's of leadership: high in Energy, the ability to Energise others, the Edge to make difficult decisions and the ability to Execute or deliver on the promise.

### **Results:**

Hiring decisions are made mainly based on candidates' previous results. However, you need to distinguish between the person's impact on outcomes (negative or positive) through the choices and decisions they made. Someone may have performed poorly in a business that was doing well and camouflaged their failure. Conversely, someone may have performed well in a company that failed through no fault of their own.


### **Performance: Looking into the past.**

You should look to determine the person's impact on results. To what extent, if any, did the candidate influence business outcomes? Can their success be attributed to them or simply being in the right place? Looking into the future. Ask how they might take the business forward through Q&A at the interview or a request to present a mini business plan at the second or third interview stage. You need to determine how they may approach the role and what results you might expect.

### **Growth potential:**

You need to assess not just their competence to undertake the current requirements but their ability to grow with you as your needs and challenges change.



A close-up photograph of a person's hands holding a white smartphone. The person is wearing a white button-down shirt. Their right hand is holding the phone, while their left index finger points at the screen. The background is blurred, showing more of the shirt and a hint of a cup.

Soundings can be generic...

What do you make of them?' 'How were they regarded?' How would you describe their leadership style? To what extent did others buy into their ideas?

Or specific to the needs of the opening...

What was the nature of his or her involvement with the restructuring project or turnaround of the business?'

### 3. SOUNDINGS ARE CRITICAL

## What's a sounding?

A sounding is taking up an informal verbal reference or opinion of someone to get an inside line on them or validate a point of view.

One option is to seek a candidate's approval to take up a sounding when you have reached an advanced stage in the interview process.

Assuming the person is employed, you may ask them to offer up a referee they previously worked for, at a previous employer or a boss who has left their current employer.

Another option is to take up a sounding without seeking the candidates' approval. In such a situation, you need to be extremely careful not to expose the fact that the candidate is interviewing with you. Obviously, if word got back to their existing employer that they are interviewing for positions elsewhere, you've compromised their commitment, reputation and employment.

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Soundings provide insights into a candidate's character.

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Often soundings give you a vital insight into a candidate's character, decision making and emotional intelligence (EI).

Invariably, the person giving the reference will often subconsciously allude to someone's EI.



## 4. REQUIRES A MORE SOPHISTICATED APPROACH

Hiring into senior exec roles requires a more sophisticated approach. It's a bigger decision for you and a bigger decision for them. And the latter should not be underestimated.

Hiring people into senior roles requires considerable tact. Senior execs do not respond well to a direct approach with concerns around confidentiality issues.

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They won't open up to you directly!

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Many employed execs would not entertain a direct dialogue, particularly when coming from a direct competitor or within business areas most closely aligned to their industry, i.e. most likely your preferred candidate background and the primary hunting ground.

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They are more challenging to get hold of.

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If you're working with a head-hunter, you'll find they can act as a sounding board, helping you shape your requirement and becoming the second set of eyes and ears. Often, they'll be able to take up soundings and help you get the inside line on a candidate.

The opportunity must be positioned well. After all, the more senior the role, the smaller the talent pool. You must properly consider why a smart, in-demand exec should want to take up this job and how you will position the opportunity to them.





# Confidence needs building on both sides



The opportunity must be positioned well. After all, the more senior the role, the smaller the talent pool. You need to properly consider why a smart, in-demand exec should want to take up this job and how you will position the opportunity to them.

Many people are familiar with hiring active job seekers.

But it's a different game when it comes to signing up an employed high achiever.

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Someone who is a high-performing individual, who's well integrated and well respected in their existing employment, needs to be courted diplomatically and engagingly.

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Often you'll need to develop their interest to get them to the interview table, and to maintain their interest level.

Few are familiar with hiring people who may be heads down and happy – you need to tune into the applicant's point of view and appreciate there are two perspectives.

Engaging with senior execs is more complex. Obviously, this is one of the critical areas in which professional headhunters add value.

And the whole process needs to be handled with sophistication and in a balanced manner. Many CXO types have little or no tolerance for a thorough examination, which is even more pronounced with those who are not actively looking.

If you want to land an "A" player candidate, you'll want the candidate to interact with an "A" player hiring team. So, field a good hiring team.



## 5. CONFIDENTIALITY REQUIRED

Sometimes confidential hires are secretive because you don't want a team/s to know someone is leaving...

However, often they'll be of a 'cloak and dagger' nature. This is when an incumbent job holder needs to be replaced, and a candidate lined up in advance of that person being let go.

Perhaps someone isn't performing well in their role, failing to meet targets or objectives, has poor leadership skills or may not have the qualities required to take their business or dept to the next level.

In such instances, headhunters are widely commissioned to seek out a new hire confidently without the incumbent being aware that they are being replaced.

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Headhunters can identify and approach prospective candidates without revealing a client's company name!

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They can enter into a dialogue with prospective candidates to qualify an individual's skills and abilities (do they have the qualities required of the job) and identify a candidate's situation and motivations.

Enabling them to pre-qualify the suitability and interest of candidates and generate a shortlist without the incumbent job holder becoming aware they are to be replaced.

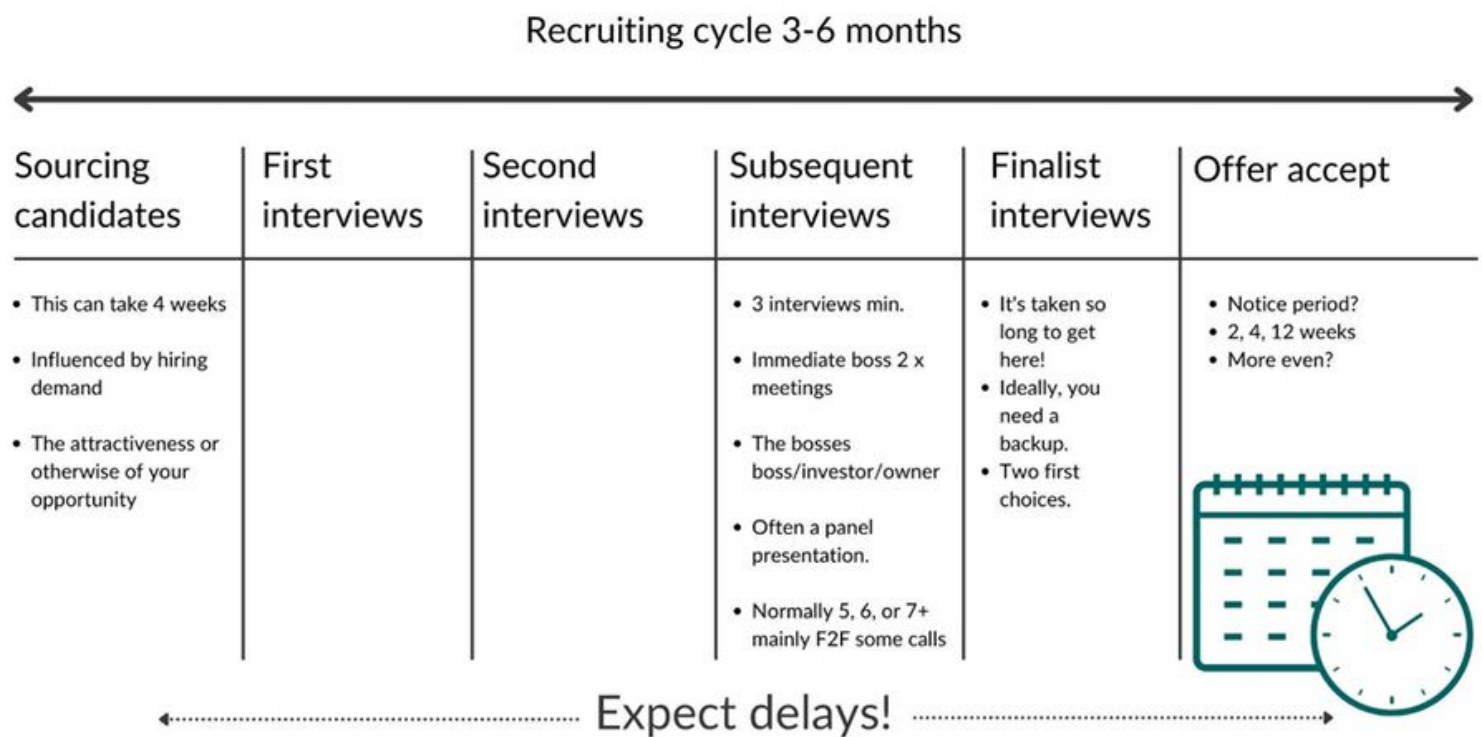
·In contrast, an employer placing an advert or directly calling people may very well result in the incumbent being aware their job is being advertised or recruited into.

Many are highly confidential





# 6. TIMESCALES ARE LONGER



There's the idealistic scenario and the realistic one.

You don't want your hiring cycle to take ages.

The reality is that they'll be delays on both the employer and candidate side, from illness, holidays, and other priorities/demands on time taking precedence. It would be best if you approached it with a sense of urgency.

- Hiring cycles are longer for senior execs, and the process is more time-consuming.
- Senior people have less time than others. Their diaries are fuller, there are more demands on them, and they have more responsibilities. Getting time in diaries will be difficult on both sides, and appointment changes are often more likely at senior levels.
- There is more caution on both sides. Decisions are not rushed at senior levels, and there tend to be more stages.
- Notice periods are often three or six months. And execs often want to complete a project before moving on. You need to pay attention to this early in the interview process when considering a candidate's merits and what you want!
- When hiring for regular jobs, recruiting cycles may be under four weeks. This may be 4 to 8 weeks or more for specialist and senior/exec roles, perhaps 3 to 6 months.

If you're working with a headhunter, you can expect them to work in your interests to maintain cadence.



## 7. CONCLUSION

Senior hires are more strategic, and so when hiring into them, you need to think about your mid and long-term goals, not just your short-term ones.

If the role reports to you...

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Meet with the candidate at least three times.

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You need to take ownership for making the right decision. This means not only seeking the opinions of others and properly thinking them over but also making sure you've got to know your prospective hire well enough.

To do so, you'll probably meet with the candidate three or more times. One or more of these interactions could be a phone call – they're often more practical and quicker to set up and complete.

You need to tune into a senior hire's character and abilities at a deeper level!

At an advanced stage, why not take up a sounding, do so before getting to an offer stage. You could speak with a former employer/boss.

The best candidates are those who are most sought after and most likely to be counter-offered! Building interest and confidence throughout the interview process is necessary.

If you're replacing a senior exec and want a replacement lined up, it's a no-brainer, using a headhunter is likely to be your best option.

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The hiring process dilutes operational effectiveness.

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The process of sourcing, screening and progressing senior-level candidates is incredibly time-consuming, again, this is another merit of engaging with a headhunter.

Timescales are longer. You'll probably need to be conscious to approach the process with a sense of urgency to avoid it becoming a long, drawn out and distracting process.

