

# HOW TO SELECT AN EXECUTIVE SEARCH FIRM

BY ELLIOTT RAE

At Anderson Quigley, we express an interest in working with clients on executive search assignments in various ways. For example, there is usually a tender to write and sometimes a pitch, face to face or virtual. We secure some work through long established relationships, but most we have to bid for competitively, with a range of factors coming into play – relevant experience, profile of the company, approach to search, ability to secure a diverse range of candidates and, of course, price. Sometimes, we have free reign to respond to the brief; other times, we are responding to a procurement-led process, answering very specific questions.

So, how do clients decide who to work with on an assignment? We sometimes get insight into scoring or decision-making, but more often than not, it's a simple "Yes, we'd like to work with you" or "We've decided to engage someone else".

I've often wondered how I would decide who to work with if I was engaging a search firm on a high level role. Familiarity with the firm would help, as would knowing the people who'd be running the assignment. But I'd need to secure value for my organisation and would want to reach out beyond my existing circle of contacts to find the best firm for the job.

I'd be keen to understand how the firm manages recruitment for a senior position: What does the hiring process look like? To what extent are they proactive in reaching out to candidates, as opposed to connecting with active job seekers? How do they work with technology, including LinkedIn, to engage candidate markets and promote career opportunities? Do they offer leadership assessment as well as executive search services?

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I'd also want to learn more about the firm's wider experience: How do they support clients and candidates? Do they focus exclusively on leadership roles and executive positions, or is their offer broader? How do they work with clients to support their leadership needs and deliver a pipeline of leadership talent? And how do they work with clients post-appointment, for example, can they support the onboarding of placed candidates and offer executive coaching? I'd also explore their views on industry trends and the evolving requirements of executive leadership.

Finally, I'd ask for references and testimonials to gain an external view, ideally from someone people I know and trust, about their competency in executive search and talent management.

So, this is quite a long list of questions! But it would help me understand a firm's strengths and, as importantly, their values. They'd be representing my organisation to a wide audience, so I'd really want our values to be aligned – I think that is at the heart of a successful executive search partnership.



*Before co-founding Anderson Quigley, Elliott spent five years developing and leading the education practice at another major executive search firm. Collaborating with clients across the education system, he has supported the appointment of vice-chancellors, chief executives and principals, academic and professional services leaders, chairs and board members.*

*Passionate about delivering an outstanding candidate and client experience, Elliott is proud to have supported a diverse range of candidates, over two decades, to secure exciting and often transformative new roles. Motivated by his own journey through the education system, Elliott enjoys supporting organisations that deliver societal benefit.*

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