

HOW MUCH HAS THE WRONG HIRE COST YOU AND YOUR COMPANY?



LEVELING UP
EXECUTIVE
SEARCH IN
THE 21ST
CENTURY

*A conversation with
Sherry Cadsawan,
CEO, Talence Group
Executive Search
and Consulting*

| BY GINA RILEY



I've helped multi-billion-dollar companies attract talent to build their executive teams.

Hiring the wrong executive puts a company at a costly, uncompetitive disadvantage. Conducting a thorough executive search process helps protect financial, people, and cultural assets. I wanted to unpack what underpins a successful executive search by interviewing an entrepreneurial business leader with over thirty years in talent acquisition and leadership-level search expertise.

I invite you to read my Q&A with Sherry Cadsawan, CEO and Founder of Talence Group Executive Search and Consulting. Cadsawan's experience spans Fortune 100s to

small private businesses across industries in technology, consumer goods, energy, sports and entertainment, food and beverage, financial, healthcare, and nonprofit. She is an established leader in the executive recruitment industry and admired for her insights, astute resourcefulness, and optimistic zeal that inspires clients and candidates alike.

One client recently said Cadsawan has "rewritten the rules of recruiting" and has a "surgical approach" to partnering with companies. She developed and has tested a bespoke

talent-assessment model that yields unprecedented results.

This article is for decision makers who are curious about how executive search companies partner to find leadership talent. It is also for leaders who are in career transition, needing insight into an executive search consultant's methods and priorities to build effective recruiter relationships as a part of their job-search strategy.

Sherry, would you start off by giving me a few career-story highlights?

A quick overview is to say I have

global expertise and served Fortune 100s to small, private, and family-owned businesses. I've led talent acquisition for significant merger, acquisition, and integration activities. I've helped multi-billion-dollar companies attract talent to build their executive teams. All these opportunities helped inform me of what works and what doesn't when it comes to hiring the right leaders who not only execute but who can attract and mentor talent that strengthens their bench.

After twenty years working in a corporate environment, why did you leave to start your own executive search firm?

Over the years, I found myself as an advisor to executives who were struggling with removing an ineffective leader and needed my help identifying the leadership skills required to do the job successfully. I started to realize there was a void in the market for effectively identifying and hiring strong leaders. Nobody was focusing on leadership skills and experience. They were primarily focused on words on a résumé. My goal became helping companies keep their competitive advantage by selecting the right people who aligned with their strategic objectives and had proven people leadership skills.

Since then, I developed a unique talent model focused on leadership assessment, selecting leaders with vision, who can connect and engage the workforce.

It was painful to watch companies make hiring decisions that were detrimental to their company. The cost to them went well beyond lost time and opportunity; at times, it led to irreparable damage on their revenue and hampered achievable growth. The wrong leadership hire can damage so many areas of the business including harm to their employment brand, which may have taken years to build. On top of that, I saw the downstream impact on loyal customers.

Now, my mission is to help my clients make

well-informed hiring decisions that have a positive and long-term impact on their business.

What are the top mistakes you've seen leaders and board of directors make that resulted in a mis-hire for a critical executive-level role?

Where do I start? Bias towards people they know, were referred by the Board, have Ivy League degrees, worked at a brand-name company, or simply because they are from the same industry in the exact role they are hiring for. Not only does this eliminate the opportunity to hire for diversity, but these people are not hired on their proven leadership ability and fit to the organization. One of the worst mistakes I've seen leaders make is not considering great candidates because they don't recognize the name of their university or place of employment.

What makes an executive hire successful is having a competitive recruitment and considering non-traditional candidates across industries without geographical borders. Then, evaluating them on past accomplishments, KSAs, diversity, and a career journey with proven experience, successes, failures, and hard work.

Once they meet this criterion, you now need to deeply evaluate them on their leadership approach and against the company culture and values. The hiring team should dig deep into **how** the work gets done, not just **what** gets done. How does the candidate "rally the troops," get people to want to follow them, and collaborate with people below, above, and next to them? Does this leader take a unified "one team" approach to their work?

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What would you say are your client companies' biggest concerns as they launch an executive search?

Companies fear hiring the wrong person, which is why our proven model helps avoid a hiring misfire. They want a good return on their investment when hiring an executive search firm, but you need to realize the cost of the hire isn't just in the recruitment. Either future-proof and get a benefit from hiring the right person who will make a difference, or you have further loss if you select the wrong person.

I recently conducted a poll on LinkedIn and one question that came up was, "Why hire a search firm? How do they add value beyond filling the role?"

Companies hire an executive search firm to provide confidence they will select the right person who is the best possible fit for the leadership role, the business, and the culture. They hire us to have a broader reach as well as to be an extension of them in the market and broadcast their value proposition. Bottom line: We provide them with an efficient channel and manage the search to keep everyone in alignment.

What our clients value the most is not so much **what** we do, but **how** we do it – it is our secret sauce! We naturally bring an outsider perspective to the stakeholders and unbiased input that broadens their thinking. We unravel the feedback from the team and help everyone focus on the mission and outcomes of the role in a way that helps them evaluate who would be the most successful candidate.

Many search firm homepages have similar language about their consulting and hiring process. What distinguishes your process in the marketplace?

We know businesses today face fierce competitive pressure and getting the right people in the right jobs has never been more important. Our experience led us to successfully test and validate our own SMART candidate evaluation model to address today's demanding needs. This differentiated approach has led us to a successful 99% fill rate.

Recently, our client, a CEO of a global, multibillion-dollar company, told me that our discovery process is so thorough he is using the input we captured to jumpstart their next strategy meeting. We take the CEO's vision in conjunction with what the stakeholders need and align



our talent search accordingly.

How should a company evaluate executive search firms? Any warning signs it might not be a good match?

First, ask them about their approach and method. Second, ask them who their clients are. Third, ask them about their guarantee. Also, listen to hear if you are getting a sales pitch or if they are truly consulting and listening to understand your unique business challenges.

If you could offer one piece of advice to leadership and executive-level clients, meaning client companies, what would it be?

Know what you are recruiting for – it goes back to the first step of our process, discovery. What is the mission of the role? What do you need them to achieve? What are the desired outcomes? Write that down, because that is what you will measure them against at the end of the year. Then ask what skills they need to be successful.

How do you help your client companies avoid costly hiring mistakes?

Other than training them on our SMART evaluation tool, which stands for Strategic, Motivational, Authentic, Resilient, and Transformative, we also love to provide our Assessment & Selection training program if they want to upskill their interview team. We know that our method works, because other than our 99% successful fill rate, we can also say our candidates have a 98% retention rate, and 99% of our customers endorse our work.

Do your clients worry your process will take too much time?

There is a difference between speed and efficiency. They quickly see they don't want to skip any steps in our process – and that takes some time. This is not a product they are buying; this is a person they are

evaluating and getting to know. It is kind of like dating. You need to spend time with the person to see if they are the right fit.

I noticed you didn't say "culture fit." How do you determine fit?

Our definition of "fit" is evaluating the candidate's skills, values, and passion for the job. We don't straight out ask candidates what their values are; instead, we look to see if the values come through each story they share with us. Then, we look and listen for a values alignment with the company's values. So, we are looking for a "fit to values" versus saying "culture fit." The experience we have from holding deep conversations allows us to listen for common themes with how the best leaders show up.

How do you assess future potential vs. past achievements?

I think potential shows up in past behaviors and accomplishments or failures. It shows up when you share experiences, what you have learned, and why you are a stronger leader and decision maker because of this. I really believe the best leaders show up to an interview prepared to provide information as well as gather information to help determine their fit for what the company needs.

High-quality interviews occur when the candidate has done their research and can anticipate what is going to be important to share. They show up humble and ready to listen. The candidate should be dissecting the questions asked by the interviewer to understand what they are being asked. Then, the candidate can provide aligned past experiences that demonstrate knowledge or expertise in the area the interviewer is trying to uncover.

What about your greatest placement failures? What happened and how did these mistakes influence your work today?

If we go back to the three pillars of skills, values, and passion, something was out of





alignment. Fortunately, we've had very few hiring failures because we go deep with the client before going out to search. However, the failed hires are heart-breaking and gave us painful key learnings.

One failed recruitment was replacing the owner and CEO of a company. The owner/CEO convinced us that he was ready to let go of the reins and hand them off to a new CEO. When it came down to it, though, the former CEO was unable to stay out of the day-to-day operations, and he smothered the new leader, who decided to leave the company. Having two chefs in the kitchen rarely works out.

When you put someone in charge as leader, you have to let them be the leader. In most cases, what I have learned is you should not have a leader replace themselves because it rarely works – at any level, really. I have seen this fail time and again in my career. Sometimes it can work when a leader has been promoted, and they are backfilling the role

because they are fully vested in getting to the right result.

Can you think of a candidate story that really grabbed or hooked you? Are there types of stories that are better to tell in interviews?

What really hooks me onto a candidate is someone who shows up as a SMART leader. Aside from being strategic, they are authentic and communicate from the heart. They don't just give you answers that you want to hear. They share their failures in a natural and reflective way. They talk about challenges they overcame and what they learned.

It is not one story; it is the entire package of how they show up to tell their stories.

We also appreciate thoughtful leaders who listen to understand what we are digging for, which include times of struggle. These candidates are the best interviewees because they know how to navigate the conversation. It also shows me the candidate wants a

good match, not just a job. They are honest and authentic by explaining what they are great at and not-so-great at because if that's not what we are looking for, they want to respectfully bow out.

Hiring for diversity is vital for a thriving business today. How do you consult with diversity and equity in mind?

It is super critical. It is our strategy to cast a wide net for candidates and help our client see that attracting a diverse candidate pool means opening to other industries and locations, and intentionally looking in unexpected places. I encourage them to think about the value of diversity and the positive impact it has on their business and culture.

Hiring for diversity must be intentional. We tell our clients upfront about our diversity recruitment strategy, and we encourage them to make diversity candidates a priority. We can't control the final outcome, but we can

influence who gets exposure and who is at the top of the list in the pipeline. We have this conversation at the beginning of every recruitment.

This approach has been working, and we've placed several incredible diversity candidates who may have been overlooked otherwise.

It sounds like you've been able to help companies make it a priority, but I imagine you partner with companies that are on the cutting edge with their diversity hiring practices.

It puts a smile on my face when my client brings up the topic before I do. They want to know our strategy to recruit diversity candidates, and together we can drive for diversity hiring.

On the other hand, when we work with a company that is not as focused on diversity, it's an opportunity for us to educate and share with them our philosophy and practices. We're going to do it with intentionality whether they've asked for that or not. I feel like those clients appreciate it because it reminds them diverse hiring should be a priority.

What top "non-starters" do you observe when you are interviewing executive-level candidates? What mistakes do you see candidates make?

That is easy. Arrogant people who can't listen and never stop talking. Leaders must be great listeners and authentic communicators. If they can't quickly convey or contextualize the information they're sharing, it's all over. This means they don't have executive presence.

A few others would be when people put their credentials, pedigree,



rolodex, or degrees forward over driving real results. Not giving credit where credit is due. And, when the candidate is not prepared for the interview when they had ample time to do research. These are all showstoppers.

Being an entrepreneur and leading your own company is very time-consuming. What do you like to do for fun? What makes you tick?

I enjoy reading leadership books and following leadership luminaries. I have been described as an energetic and entrepreneurial person who loves to work hard and play hard. I appreciate the outdoors and spend time mountain or road biking, skiing, and running, and now I am a beginner surfer. Most days, I do find the time to run with my very big, energetic mutts who love backroad trips. I lived in Brazil earlier in my life and learned Portuguese. Spending time abroad with my family is simply the best.

Sherry, thank you so much for your time and sharing your experience and philosophy about hiring leaders and assessing talent. What we did not cover here is the importance of building relationships with executive search consultants as a part of a holistic job-search strategy. It can be one advantageous networking strategy -- and I know your insights will give many leadership-level job seekers ideas about how experienced recruiters assess talent.

Where can people find out more about you and Talence Group?

They can find me at talencegroup.com. I'm also on LinkedIn most days and welcome personalized connection requests.

Speaking of that, a great way for people to stay on top of new opportunities we promote is to follow Talence Group's LinkedIn company page and "follow" each member of the Talence Group team. It is an important job-search strategy to follow any company you have an interest in.

Thanks again for your time!

CONTRIBUTING WRITER'S PROFILE



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