



In a routine update, members of a search committee in our library told me that not only was their search going well, but that they **looked forward to their team meetings** and **gained energy from them!** Anyone who has participated in an academic search process knows how rare that is, yet we also know that hiring is one of the most important things we do to build a successful organization. **What was their secret?** Here's an inside look at their experience and insight into recreating their success.

~ Janet Cottrell, 2014

*What would it look like if...*

**Recruitment and hiring were productive *and* fun?**

**Define success up-front.**

**Discuss what the *best possible recruitment process* would be like, both from a candidate's point of view and from the hiring organization's perspective.** Envisioning an optimal process can inform everything from the job ad to the interviews and decision-making process. Early on, the search team in this case study discussed their own experiences both as candidates and as members of a hiring team, and their hopes for the search at hand. They asked themselves these questions before the job was posted, and continued to return to their answers throughout the process:

- What would it look like to run a great search?
- What was the best job interview you've ever been on? Why was it so great? What attracted you to the job? How did the hiring organization treat you?
- What's the most outstanding hire you have ever made (or seen made)? What processes contributed to that?

**Discover the core values you want.**

**Identify what *key values* are essential for the job and for the organization.**

Let's face it: we have a tendency to want to hire "people like us." While this can be a questionable practice if based on the wrong attributes and micro-biases need to be kept in check, it can be illuminating to interpret the search process as an opportunity to consider how core values contribute to a strong and long-lasting hiring match. If your organization has a formal values statement or an informal ethos, use it as a litmus test throughout your process, as the search team in this case study did, by asking:

- How do our organization's values match up with this candidate's values?
- How might the organization's values evolve if this candidate joined the team?

**Reframe the search process.**

**Keep candidates *in the pool* for as long as possible rather than weeding them out as quickly as possible.**

This likely sounds counterintuitive because our first impulse often is to weed the pool down to a manageable size as soon as possible. And it may sound like a lot of work—but the results can be amazing! By looking for reasons to keep candidates in the pool, you are likely to learn more about them and discover strengths that can truly benefit your organization. This may mean spending more time in the initial phases of the search or phoning more candidates for preliminary interviews. This search team adopted "keep candidates in the pool" as a mindset through both early and later stages of the search and felt it vastly improved their choice of finalists. At each stage, they asked:

- What do we want to learn about this candidate?
- What would this candidate bring to the team?



## Design generative questions for the candidates.

**Ask questions that draw on experience—and draw out the person.** Hand your candidates good talking points! Asking candidates behavioral competence-based questions is an effective way to learn whether they are well-matched for your position, and gives them an opportunity to showcase their strengths. You also want your candidates to be authentic and open; to achieve that, be prepared to share information about your organization and yourselves freely and transparently. Consider questions such as:

- Could you tell us about a time when you were successful at this task in the past?
- Tell us about a time when you worked as part of a team that accomplished great things. What was that like?
- Could you say more about that...?

## Seek success with every candidate.

**Treat each applicant as though you want their candidacy to *succeed*.** The search committee in this case study viewed their true job as creating a process that not only allowed, but actually *ensured* that the best attributes of every candidate emerged during the recruitment process. They identified strengths in every applicant, and worked to explore how those specific strengths – which differed from candidate to candidate – could complement the existing team, leading to a diverse group of finalists. They also recognized that every interview is a two-way street and that candidates are interviewing us just as we are interviewing them, and worked toward presenting an accurate and positive impression. They asked themselves:

- What are this candidate’s strengths? How can we showcase these attributes?
- How would this candidate complement or benefit the team?
- What kind of impression are we leaving with this candidate?

## Think holistically.

**Hire the person, not just the skill set.** Even in the initial stages, try to learn as much about each candidate as possible. You will certainly require specific credentials, experience, and expertise, but if you find yourself wavering between two candidates, consider each candidate as a whole rather than focusing only on their credentials or experience. The successful search team in the case study considered questions such as:

- What would it be like to be stranded with in an airport with this candidate?
- Can I imagine working to meet a tight deadline with them?
- Would I turn to them for help when I need a hand?

## Commit to an iterative reflective process.

**As a search team, use reflection and questions as means to reaching your end goal.** The committee in the case study reminded themselves of the principles identified here, either implicitly or explicitly, all through their search process. “It was an ethos in our heads, a mindset,” they reported, describing their iterative process. At every stage, they asked themselves:

- What would it look like to “keep candidates in the pool” at this point in our search?
- What would it look like to “focus on the person not the skill set” at this point?
- Have we designed interview questions to showcase this candidate’s strengths?

## Envision the organization you want to create.

**Think long-term.** Hiring is arguably the most important work we do. The people we hire help to shape the organization we work in, and each and every hire can have a tremendous impact on our organization and ourselves. The search team whose work inspired this report challenged themselves to do everything they could to work toward a successful outcome – and found their results were worth that investment.

- How can we most effectively identify the best new colleague for ourselves and for the organization?
- Personally and professionally, what would it look like if we invest everything we can in this process?

