

A Letter to Club Executive Search Firms

The Job Market or “When I Need You Most”

Dear Search Firm Consultants:

I recently read an article in Club Management magazine written by a highly qualified person that I have great respect for. He was quoted as saying “The best candidates are recruited for the best jobs: They are running clubs.” I understand his perspective. Certainly many of the best club managers are not faced with the reality that they are not a fit for their present club or they get a new board that wants to make a change. However, strange things happen in clubs. That is when a manager needs a search consultant most.

In the past three years I have had the occasion to have two clients who needed a new general manager. Although I don’t emphasize GM searches, I have done them. These two clubs had trust in me and wanted me to complete the search for them. To that end, after reviewing well over 100 resumes in both cases and after completing all the due diligence, I drilled down to between 10 and 12 candidates. The search committee reviewed this first list of resumes and cut the group to between 6 and seven to interview. In both cases I presented a list that included both employed and unemployed individuals. In one case the list included seven employed and 5 unemployed and in the other case it was six and six.

A number of years ago a friend of mine in the search business said to me that they could not present an unemployed candidate because the committees expected them to steal someone for another good club. Today the state of the economy has changed significantly. There are many good managers that for a variety of reasons, some no fault of their own, find themselves without a job. How are they going to resurrect their careers if none of the major search consultants will present them for any reasonable job? This is where the consultant should sort through the circumstances and get behind an unemployed manager when they need them the most.

In the case of the first club, when the dust settled on the process, they club selected a highly qualified GM who had been downsized. He was a CMAA chapter officer and has been at the club now for over two years and is doing a fabulous job. If we had not considered unemployed candidates the club would have been worse off and the GM would not have gotten the chance he deserved. In the second case the club hired an employed manager but a couple of the unemployed managers were finalists.

Yes, there are a number of managers with a questionable employment history who are always applying for jobs. And yes, a top firm can easily sort through and discount those individuals. However, the market is dynamic and new people are getting into the job search regularly. I am sure that the aforementioned author realizes this and will help the good manager who finds themselves on the out. However, the nature of the article did not seem sympathetic to that circumstance.

Clubs also have another choice. Recently we were hired by a club to complete an operating audit and then hired to work with the GM to fine tune his skills and implement the 40 plus audit initiatives. They decided that because of his tenure and the fact that he was well liked by the members that it was in the best interest of the club to try to help him succeed. Today he is a new man with a whole different perspective. The board has new respect for him and it appears the club is significantly better off for the process

Now that is unique. How many times have you seen a club go to the extra effort to help their GM instead of just pitching him or her out and starting over? The club saved a considerable amount of money by not having to make a major personnel change.

Today's market is unique. We may find some exceptional GM's among the millions of unemployed. So to those clubs searching for a GM, thoughtfully review all potential applicants. There may be some real deals out there.