

ENROLLMENT MANAGER

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 4

OCTOBER 1, 2012

MAXIMIZING YOUR CHANCES FOR SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE SEARCHES

Cheryl Hyatt
Partner
Hyatt-Fennell

Marylouise Fennell, RSM
Principal
Hyatt-Fennell

In our first article, we discussed “derailers” which are often fatal to well-qualified candidates in executive searches and what those who seek senior-level positions can do to avoid them. This piece will highlight “enhancers” that will maximize a candidate’s chance for success in the highly competitive market of higher education.

Doing your homework. You should study the website and become familiar with the institution and search committee members, academic programs, history and location. Conduct an online search of recent relevant articles about the institution and its peers in higher education as well as general circulation publications. Candidates derail themselves by asking basic questions which can be easily answered online and by confusing such fundamentals as the correct name of the institution and the exact job title. Work hard at finding people you know that know the institution and ask them questions.

Manage your electronic identity. Employers increasingly go first to candidates’ online presence on Facebook and other social media sites, while also running Google searches, as a first step in the screening process. Check your phone message as well as any music that leads up to your message and watch out what your email address might say about you. Make the email address professional - “25 Beer Guy” did not get a position until he changed his email address. Please do not use your current position’s email address, it is not appropriate. Make sure your presence reflects your fit for senior-level positions. This is not the time to be cute or foolish!

Submitting flawlessly-written CVs and cover letters. Misspellings, even small grammatical and punctuation errors and “wrong” homonyms are a poor reflection on you at this level. We suggest you always have a second set of eyes review your materials before submitting.

Preparing thoughtful and insightful questions. Questions about such issues as mission and strategic plans (even requesting copies of the latter in advance for semi-finalists) show not just attention to detail, but signal genuine interest in the institution and the position. Semi-finalists should also inquire about upcoming audits and accreditations, tuition discounting, enrollment trends, percentages of tenured faculty, finances, fundraising and any crises in the last three years.

Get yourself onto college or other not-for-profit boards. Such service will not only enhance your credibility with search committees, it will bolster your knowledge of the role of philanthropy and volunteer leadership within complex organizations. Everyone is looking for people with some development background for every position. Be sure you understand basic finance even if it is necessary to take some courses. Be sure you understand how to read a college audit.

Know who makes the hiring decisions. This step is critical in the “homework” process of interview preparation. If the institution is faith-based, this is also a critical factor in the hiring process.

At the interview itself,

Expect one or more “curveball” questions. Handle these professionally and calmly, without becoming defensive. The interviewer is more interested in the way in which you respond, rather than in your specific answer.

Don’t be afraid of gaps in the conversation. Silence doesn’t have to be filled immediately; pauses give you a chance to think and regroup for the next question. Many interviewers purposely encourage pauses to see if you will overshare. Resist this temptation. Closely related is this counsel:

As our late colleague Timothy Healy, SJ, former president of Georgetown University, used to say of high-level university searches, “We are looking for God on a good day.” Although you may not be able to achieve this standard, by following these suggestions you can enhance your authori-

ty, appearing more confident and capable to campus search committees.

Lastly, remember to SMILE. You should be pleased you have been chosen to come this far!

Dr. Marylouise Fennell, RSM, has spent more than 35 years in higher education administration and search and is among the best-known and highly respected consultants in the field of independent higher education. She served as president of Carlow University in Pittsburgh and is presently the senior counsel to the Washington, DC-based Council of Independent Colleges. She has been an independent search consultant for more than 20 years and has consulted widely throughout the world, where she worked with many colleges, universities and non-profits. Dr. Fennell currently sits on three college boards.

With almost 20 years of executive search consulting experience, Cheryl Hyatt has been responsible for successfully recruiting senior administrative professionals for educational and non-profit organizations. She brings 30 years of management and organizational leadership experience to her role with clients. Cheryl's breadth of experience, knowledge and contacts make her sought after professionally in her field. Mrs. Hyatt also sits on various local non-profit boards offering a variety of expertise to each organization.