

What recruiters and hiring organizations wish they could tell you

By Donna Padilla, Senior Partner & Vice Chair, Healthcare Practice

Whether you are searching for an executive position for the first time or not, there are some key points to know that pertain to any job search. While each situation is unique, common themes and process points tend to surface each time a position is filled. Below is a list of tips that any organization or recruiter wishes you knew before embarking on a search.

Level of interest. It is always good to be open to opportunities that cross your desk. Ninety-nine percent of the time these opportunities are appropriate for networking rather than acting upon. While you may want to learn more, it is important to weigh your interest against your current professional and personal situation. If you are not making the move alone, don't make the decision alone. Involving family early in the process is critical. Inviting your spouse/partner to visit the location — especially if they are unsure — is also a good idea. Waffling interest and last minute turndowns are damaging to the search process and, ultimately, your reputation.

No surprises. Looking at a new opportunity and preparing for an interview is a great time for personal and professional reflection. We have all had moments in our careers that we wish we could do over or had handled differently. If there is something in your past — for example, a short career stop you have not included on your resume or something that will show up in a more thorough background check — it is best to bring that to light as early as possible. Your recruiter will be better able to address the situation up front with the organization and advise you on how to discuss it moving forward. The worst case scenario is a surprise at the 11th hour, not only because of what has surfaced, but more importantly your decision to hold back that information. From the beginning, the search process and interviews help to build a trusting relationship between the candidate and the organization with which they are interviewing. Full transparency is the right thing to do for you and the hiring organization.

The interview. The best advice is to do your homework. Seek feedback from the search consultant on what to anticipate and how to prepare. Ask for and expect to receive direct feedback regarding your presentation. This feedback is not meant to be critical, but to help with the specific search you are considering as well as for future interviews. When onsite, make sure you are listening as actively as you are presenting yourself. Come prepared with questions. Even if you are in your 15th interview of the day, convey enthusiasm and interest. You want the interview to feel more like a meeting than a strained conversation. Creating a dialogue is a shared responsibility.

The social element. A social dinner is often a critical step in the final interview process. Remember that you are still a candidate and want to present yourself as engaged and able to interact socially and professionally. While onsite, you'll be given a tour of the community and will likely be joined by a realtor and organization host. Both are there to help guide you as well as gauge your interest. Many, if not all, organizations will ask the realtor for feedback on how the tour went. Similar to the dinner, this is an opportunity to show how you come across out of the spotlight.

The time commitment. Do not underestimate the time a search will take, especially if you are employed. Typically, searches have several rounds and are almost always held in person and onsite. Make sure your recruiter or the organization is aware of any schedule constraints (e.g., existing vacations or a current location from which traveling is difficult). Strategize early about how you will approach these visits.

The offer. This is a conversation that needs to start at the beginning of any search. Letting the recruiter know the full extent of your current compensation package as well as any non-negotiables is critical. Is there a specific salary that you need in order to make a move? Sharing this information out of the gate helps set expectations all the way around and eliminate wasted energy for both you and the hiring organization. Relocation is a significant piece of the pie. Let your recruiter know if there are specific issues that you foresee (e.g., current housing market, exotic car collection, a child in high school). Getting an early understanding of these issues helps you and your recruiter be more proactive and sets an early signal of transparency with the organization. Your recruiter should act as a partner, resource and sounding board for you throughout the search process. At times this will mean delivering the tough news, but all of the feedback and advice is focused on ensuring that you put your best foot forward and are fully prepared for the interview process.

About the Author

Donna Padilla, senior partner & vice chair, healthcare practice, is based at the firm's corporate headquarters in Oak Brook, IL. She joined Witt/Kieffer in 1999 and has participated in nearly 350 healthcare executive search assignments, including successful searches that led to the placement of CEOs, COOs, CFOs, CNOs and other senior leaders.

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