# How the Executive Search Process Works

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**November 10th, 2016**

As a candidate in the middle of the hiring process with an executive search firm and their client, it can be frustrating to be unaware of what's going on "behind the curtain."

This article provides an overview of how the search process works from the client perspective. During all stages of the process, make sure you're answering all questions honestly, including questions about compensation. Also, do not get in touch directly with the client unless instructed to by the search professional. As the gatekeeper and decision maker for the client, it's the search professional's job to deal with candidates directly.

1. **Launch meeting with the search firm**
   The hiring client meets with the search firm to outline search requirements, timelines, future company strategy and mission, and give an idea of culture.

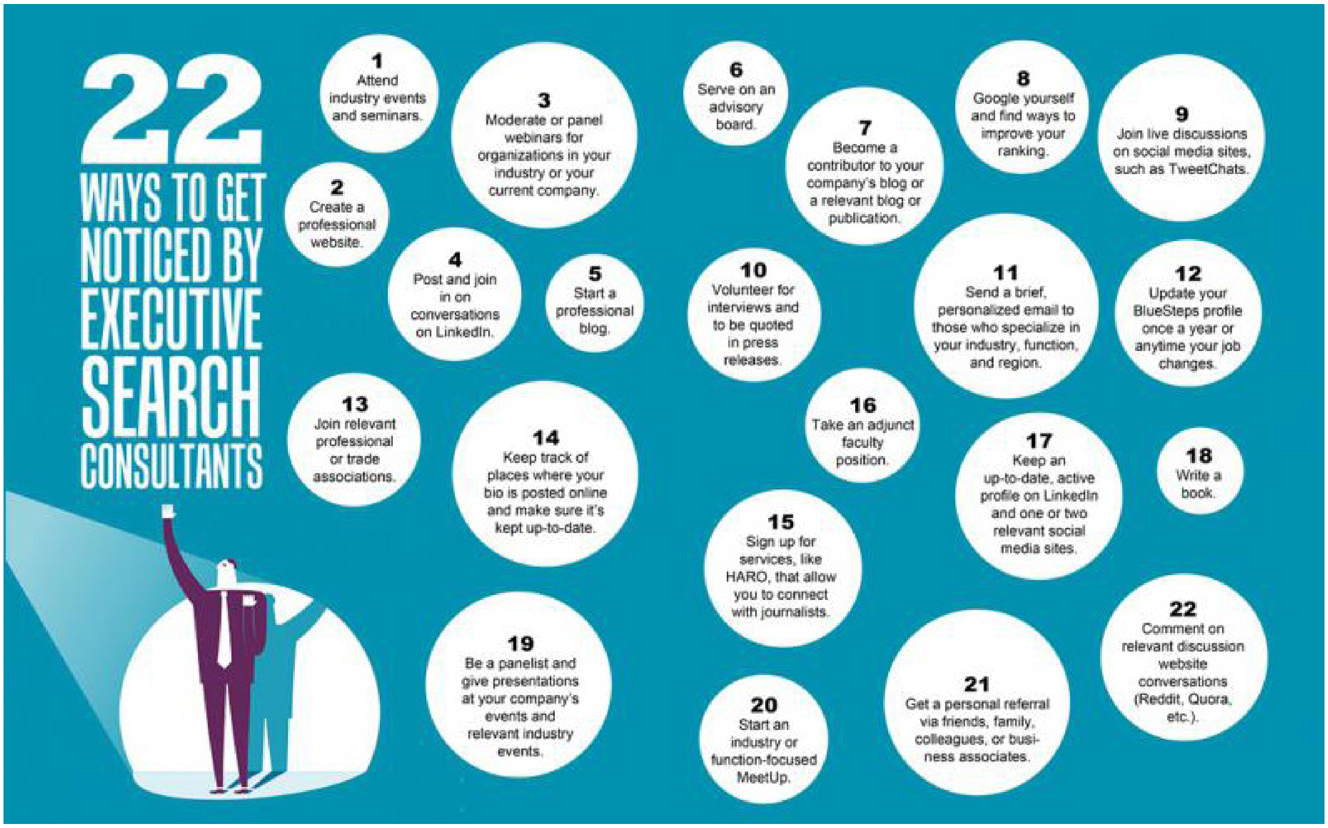
2. **Further in-depth meetings and research**
   The search firm meets with key executives and goes into a deeper analysis of the hiring company and market, identifying key opportunities for the new candidate, and defining how they could fit into the client's culture and organizational structure.

3. **Create the job description**
   The research of the previous step provides most of the insight for what's included in this document. This document is the main reference for the researchers, search consultant, and clients during the search. A job description most often contains detailed information about the role, responsibilities, the hiring client, key opportunities presented by the executive job, and outline career and educational requirements.

4. **Finalize the search plan**
   At this point, further research will be done into where and how potential top candidates will be sourced. The research tools that form part of the search strategy will often include their own database, BlueSteps (a database of senior executives, free to access for AESC members), previously conducted market analysis, alternative internet sources such as LinkedIn and other social networks, and of course, their own network and contacts.

5. **Talent mapping and sourcing**
   During this stage of the executive search process, search professionals will utilize both talent mapping and sourcing tactics. Once a long list (sometimes 100+ high-potential executives) has been drafted, executive search consultants and researchers will begin qualifying the potential targets and identifying whether they are suitable candidates.

6. **Approach, qualify and interview to create a short list**
   During the candidate identification process, the executive search firm will continue to meet with candidates (through initial calls with the researcher, more detailed follow up calls with the search consultant, and assessments), clients, and internally to narrow down the list of potential candidates (down to 10 at most). Some firms have proprietary methods of candidate qualification at this stage.




7. **Basic referencing, present short list to the client**
   Before any candidate is presented to the client, AESC search firms complete a basic background check to verify their qualifications and background. Provided there are no issues (changes will be made to the list if there are) the short list will be presented to the client.

8. **Further narrowing of the short list thorough additional reference checks**
   After the search firm presents the short list, the client will work with them to narrow the potential candidates to just three to five. At this stage the search firm will conduct even more thorough reference checks and provide final thoughts about each candidate.

9. **Interviews with the client**
   After the search firm presents the client with a short list of the top candidates, the client will conduct face-to-face interviews. During this stage, the client and search firm will discuss each candidate's resume, qualifications, personal strengths, and motivation before and after each interview. There is also an opportunity for the candidate to work with the search consultant to prepare for these interviews beforehand.

10. **Offer and negotiation**
   After a series of interviews, discussion, and consideration of external references, the client will select their preferred candidate and the process of salary and offer negotiation will commence. Often the search consultant acts as a mediator in this stage to ensure both the client's and candidate's needs are met.

11. **Onboarding and integration**
   Finally the search firm will assist with the integration (onboarding) of the successful candidate into the workplace - the degree of involvement varies depending on the wishes of the client and agreements made earlier in the search process.

This article was provided by **BlueSteps**. BlueSteps is the executive career management service of the Association of Executive Search Consultants (AESC). Boyden is a member of AESC. AESC's BlueSteps helps 100,000+ executives manage their careers, track their goals and elevate their visibility to the right search firms. **Get started >**