

Advice to the Internal Candidate During an Executive Search with External Candidates

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So, your organization has launched an executive search, and you find yourself as an internal candidate, competing with external candidates who will soon be interviewed. Here are some tips to help you prepare for the process and maximize this opportunity.



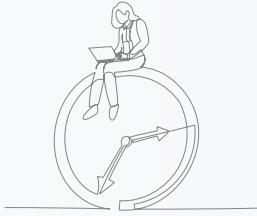
Motivation of Your Company

Your company has asked you to participate in this process because they believe you are a strong contender or have the potential to be one in the near future. They want you to go through this process to gain greater awareness of the skills and attributes needed for this larger role. Both motivations are positive. Remember, if you were not considered qualified, they would not ask you to go through this process, as it would waste your time and that of the executive recruiter and company leadership. They are investing time and resources because they respect you, want to invest in your development, and believe that experiencing this type of rigorous executive interview process will benefit you.



Motivation of the Executive Recruiter

Experienced executive recruiters frequently have internal candidates involved in their processes. It is in the recruiter's best interest to treat you with respect, as they aim to build positive relationships with everyone connected to the client. Executive recruiters are typically paid with retainers, so they should be indifferent to whether you or an external candidate is selected. A recruiter knows they need to interview and assess you more thoroughly than external candidates because you are a known entity to your company leadership. They must highlight your strengths fairly and without bias in the candidate summary document. The recruiter welcomes your help and information to present you in the best possible light. Finally, they must understand your strengths and any experience/skill gaps because an external candidate can only realistically be hired if they are significantly more qualified than you. If an external candidate has qualifications on par with yours, it doesn't make much sense to hire externally. Hence, you serve as an important calibration point for the recruiter.



Timing

An executive search can take anywhere from three to eight months, depending on various factors both internal and external to your company. Best practices suggest that the recruiter will have an introductory call with you during the first one to two weeks of the search. They will likely schedule an in-depth interview around the time external candidates begin interviewing with company leadership, typically three to four weeks later. This timing allows the recruiter to calibrate with external candidates before interviewing you.



Waiting and Patience

After your interview with the executive recruiter, there may be a significant pause where nothing happens on your end. Months can pass until the client has narrowed down the external candidates to one or two finalists. Only when the finalists are selected will the client need to compare you to them and make the final decision. One scenario is that the client feels one or both external candidates are significantly stronger than you, and they will sit down with you to explain their decision. The recruiter usually encourages the client to be honest with any internal candidate as soon as it becomes clear that the internal candidate will not progress in the process. In another scenario, the client may want you to go through the interview process similarly to the external candidates so you can make your case for why you are the best candidate.

Waiting for months without much feedback can be nerve-wracking, but it's essential to keep your cool. As the saying goes, "the patient candidate wins." No one wants this process to drag on longer than necessary, so demonstrate your poise and stay calm under pressure.



How to Prepare

A standard resume will suffice, but distinguishing between your responsibilities and accomplishments in the interview discussion is important. It helps to come prepared with bullet points that align with the requirements in the position specification. Make sure to differentiate between the results you delivered and how you achieved them. You don't need to overdo it; four to five bullet points per qualification are ideal. Avoid long prose paragraphs. As an internal candidate, you have an advantage over external candidates because you have insights into the problems that need to be addressed. Come prepared with two lists: one of the top issues, in priority order, that need addressing, and the second, your action plan if selected for the role. Again, bullet points (8-10) will suffice. You may also be asked to prepare a 100-day plan, so be ready to create a brief Word document or a half dozen PowerPoint slides. This will allow you to showcase your understanding of the situation, identify gaps, and demonstrate your analytical reasoning on how to address them.

Remember not to assume that your current organization is fully aware of your track record of accomplishments. Help the recruiter tell the story of your success. Always maintain a positive attitude and resist the temptation to criticize your company or any executives.



Show You Want the Role but Be Humble

It's appropriate to express your interest in the role, but be careful not to state that you are a "slam dunk" or "totally qualified" for this larger position. No candidate, internal or external, is ever a perfect fit. Claiming otherwise may indicate a lack of self-awareness. Be confident in your abilities but remain humble. Work with the recruiter to agree on where you realistically have gaps relative to the position specification. Every candidate, internal or external, has gaps, but a solid candidate possesses strengths and skills that outweigh those gaps.



Need for Confidentiality and Avoiding Overselling

Do not share any comments about your candidacy with coworkers. Additionally, refrain from lobbying executive management or board members for the position, as this can often backfire. Be patient and take your cues on the next steps in the process from the person leading the search on behalf of your company.



Be Concise in Your Communication Style

Generally speaking, the higher you go in management, the more you need to get to the point and avoid long-winded answers. Senior management has crushing demands on their time, and they have little patience for drawn-out responses to brief, targeted questions. Remember that the interviewer is likely jotting down bullet points to summarize your responses, so help them by being concise. Also, concise, thoughtful responses allow more time to discuss additional topics, increasing the opportunity for the interviewer to get to know you better.



Final Thoughts About the Outcome

Remember that if you are not selected for the executive position, it is not a slight against you. The decision is made in the best interest of the business, and you were involved in the process because you are a respected leader and valued member of the organization. At a minimum, the process should provide you with helpful developmental feedback. If you are ultimately selected as the finalist, everyone will know you were chosen through a rigorous search process, which will enhance your internal credibility.

Empowering Leaders to Make Confident, Talent Driven, Business Decisions

A global talent partner armed with a complete set of talent solutions, Information-driven tools and techniques, with a committed, consultative approach.

Company Summary



Global

Work completed in over 35 countries with a global team of 600+



Top 10

Our unwavering focus on client success has earned us consistent recognition as one of the best in our industry



Tech Enabled & Data-Driven

Proprietary technology and tools bringing data to decision-making



Steady Financial Foundation

Our ownership structure allows us to build for the long-term future and weather short-term volatility in financial markets



Trusted Partner

Aligning with mission-driven organizations, market disrupters, PE firms, family offices, and multi-national sector leaders