



EXECUTIVE SEARCH

Creating Tomorrow, Today.

TRANSEARCH
EXECUTIVE SEARCH & LEADERSHIP CONSULTING

John O. Burdett



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Tomorrow will be different

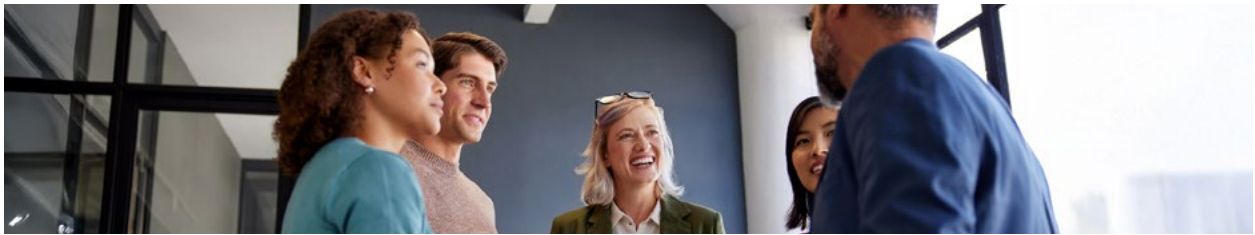
Continuing to do the same thing and expecting a different outcome is as good a definition of insanity as any.¹ Hope is not a strategy! If nothing changes ... nothing changes. With that thought in mind, for more than a few executive search firms the year ahead is a not-to-be-ignored opportunity to rethink their business model.²

Let's, however, start (as we should) with the client. The world may be largely made up of those who are merely players, but they will be performing on a very different stage. Indeed, the walls of the city have already been breached. A growing percentage of jobs will be replaced by AI ... or someone using AI. Leadership practices that hark back to the lessons of the last century are a busted flush.³ Long-established supply chains lie in ruins. “Job hugging” has replaced traditional movement in the labour market. A heightened level of anxiety from middle managers works against risk-taking. Today is the fastest things have ever been ... but the slowest they will ever be. The dilemma? Entrenched hierarchy is the archenemy of speed. Realising the promise of AI, thus, means retooling how the organization is structured. “Reinventing” may be a more accurate term.

1 A popular phrase often misattributed to Albert Einstein. Actual origin unknown.

2 A business model describes a way to be that meets (ideally excels) the customer's emerging needs and how they want the provider to deliver their product or service.

3 Inexplicably, hybrid employment – which the organization's most talented employees love – has morphed into a 1960s style command-and-control, “do as you're told” management practice. Trying to turn back the clock will have retention and hiring repercussions with the talent the organization needs most. On the other hand, perhaps black-and-white television is about to make a comeback.

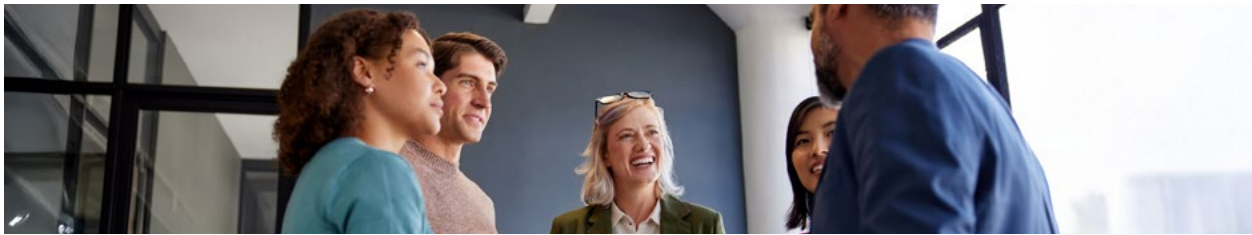


Even though faced with a chaotic level of disruption, tomorrow's large-scale businesses – because to survive they have little choice – will evolve to the point where they are fast, flat, focused, flexible, fertile to new ideas and, above all else ... an AI-enabled team of teams. The challenge? The more turbulent things get, the greater the need for organizations, large or small, to build “leadership readiness.”

The required response from an executive search business? The search providers that forge ahead will embrace an approach to business development that creates and not merely adds value.⁴ Search businesses that transcend “the ordinary” will recognise that, in times of unprecedented change, working with market leaders affords an essential, competitive differentiating, learning opportunity. We are, of course, describing a business ethos where collaboration with the client moves well beyond the so called, “trusted advisor” paradigm. As for the journey to tomorrow ... it's dominated by one undeniable business reality: “uncertainty.” To penetrate the accompanying cloud of ambiguity means orchestrating fit for the open position that, of necessity, draws heavily on breakthrough processes. Unique and innovative tools



4 Adding value would be to take advantage of the ongoing conversations between researchers and potential candidates to help the client better understand their reputation in the job market. Creating value would be to work with the client to develop an accurate and compelling hiring value proposition.



brought to life by the search practitioner's strategic empathy with the client's projected business challenge. We are describing strategic savvy that, in turn, frames a rich and compelling future shaping dialogue.

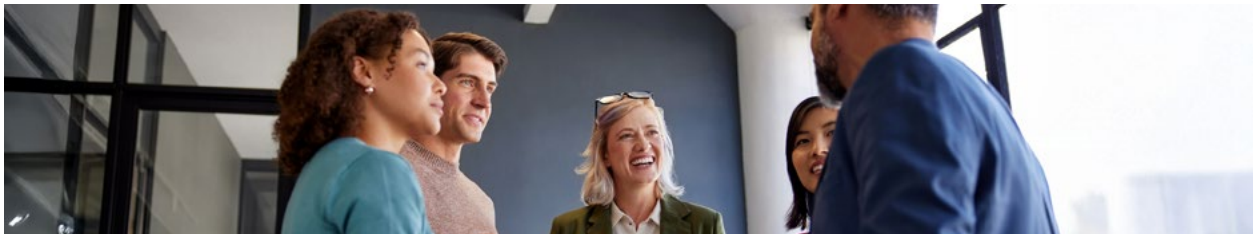
Creating tomorrow, today

We believe that during times of societal and business turmoil, the preeminent role of a successful search firm is to work with their clients to *create tomorrow, today*. From the search practitioner's standpoint, it's a philosophy that draws on five talent acquisition imperatives ... and seven points of excellence. In collaborating with the client, if the provider is fully committed to the five imperatives and diligently delivers on each of the points of excellence, the stage is set for leadership readiness to emerge.

The five talent acquisition imperatives

1. Essential as relationship and trust building are, they are merely the table stakes in collaborating with the client to make the client's business better. Here, there is a huge difference between service and serving. *Service* is how the provider acts when there is an unexpected problem. *Serving* is the flair, hard work and attention to detail that goes into anticipation. One is a reaction. The other is a mindset.
2. If you break it, you buy it! The pressure of time and workflow holdups often lead to truncating or shortchanging part or parts of the search process. Sadly, saving time in the short-term often (invariably) means spending infinitely more time trying to address (fix) a mishire. Making matters worse is that such efforts are rarely successful.
3. If you don't know what you're looking for, not even a paranoid optimist would expect you to find it. The often repeated reason why talent acquisition goes off-track is because short- and long-term success in the role are inadequately or poorly defined.⁵ This lack of discipline is compounded by the reality that far too few of those charged with making the hire decision have been trained in how to interview. Doing interviews often doesn't make you good at it. Getting

⁵ The plaintive cry of the failing, transactional search practitioner is "my clients don't want to spend the time needed to delve into 'unnecessary' process." The dilemma with treating each search as a commodity is not only the constant pressure on price but that a competitor who is offering differentiated value – and who has the stories and referrals to support their offering – will win the search every time. A commodity/transactional approach also makes it extremely difficult to bring discerning candidates into the search practice and easy for the firm's most successful talent to move to a competitor. Differentiation = stickiness.



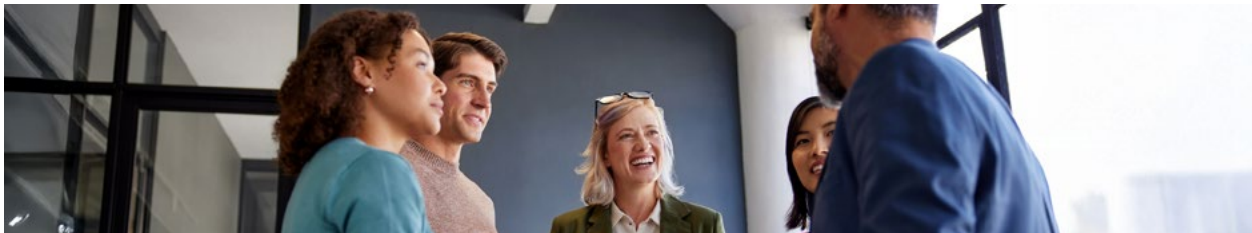
close is okay in ballroom dancing, curling or training to be a professional pickpocket. Unfortunately, a near miss in an executive search, far more often than not, signals a very costly mistake in the making.

4. Leadership success is ultimately defined not by year-end results but by the legacy the leader leaves behind. The most seductive of all leadership traps is to assume that making money means the business is healthy. General Electric, Kodak, BlackBerry, Nokia and a host of others fell into that trap.
5. Top consultants (leaders who build a great team, for that matter) have a deep understanding of the difference between cooperation and collaboration.⁶ Cooperation is the basic interpersonal platform that supports a transaction. It's enacted when two or more people share a common purpose and where each party's goals are, for the most part, focused on their own success. Collaboration is a way of working together that opens the door to value creation. Grounded in altruism and when two or more people share a common purpose, the outcome is shaped by a simple but profound philosophy, "your success is more important than mine."⁷ We can think of this as "the caring contract."



6 There are four interpersonal interactions that dominate the workplace: (1) tell; (2) sell and tell; (3) problem solving; and (4) coaching. Problem solving draws on cooperation. Coaching is collaboration writ large.

7 This does not preclude there being a formal contract in which the fees and minimal outcomes are agreed upon.



Here, let me share a story. A number of years ago, when I first got into consulting, I came up with a great question, “Who are the outstanding consultants in this part of Canada?” Having been a human resource executive for a highly regarded international business, I had a good network. In asking around, three individuals always seemed to be mentioned. Accordingly, I invited each to a one-on-one lunch in an upscale restaurant. Because my reason for meeting them was pretty flattering and, no doubt, because I was paying, each duly turned up. Somewhat to my surprise, all three were low key, candid, self-deprecating and extremely modest. Other than a heightened level of courtesy, there was little that made them stand out from the crowd. Indeed, they were a far cry from the extravert, idea-spawning, slick, close-the-sale-at-any-cost types I had been expecting.⁸ They did, nevertheless, have one trait in common. Regardless of the project or the fee involved, their clients’ success was more important than their own. And that was why their clients, through thick and thin, continued to invite them back.⁹

The seven points of excellence

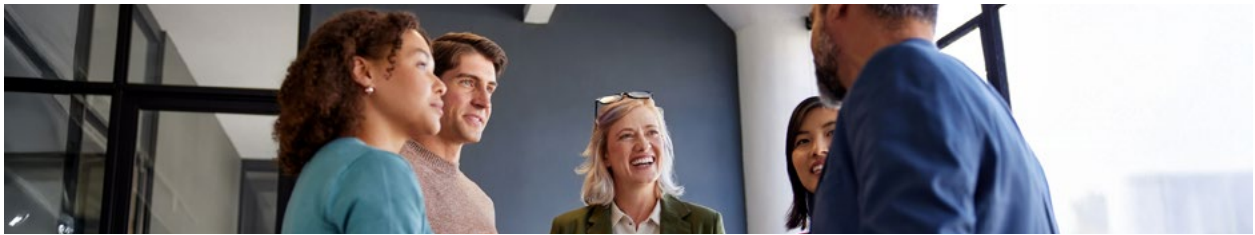
1. It is a fact of life; you can’t hire talent you can’t attract. The capacity to help the client sharpen/recast their emerging hiring value proposition is, thus, no small thing! Meanwhile, *what keeps the best attracts the rest*. Step one in revisiting the hiring value proposition is, therefore, to really know – not think you know – why the organization’s best people stay.¹⁰
2. Every (as in **every**) search is strategic. *More of the same* is easy but, if you’re not part of shaping the future, you are endorsing the past. Simply replacing today’s (recent) successful incumbent is, sooner rather than later, a mandate for mediocrity.¹¹ Maintaining the status quo and developing leadership readiness are rarely compatible.
3. Tomorrow’s organization culture and future executive performance are obverse sides of the same coin. Both demand effective, pragmatic and business-oriented measurement. Research suggests that the primary reason

⁸ A good many people’s mistaken assumption of what makes a “Rainmaker.”

⁹ The pinnacle of consulting success is when you are no longer outside the tent looking in but inside the tent looking out; when the client sees you as fully part of their team.

¹⁰ The TRANSEARCH proprietary, *Why Do You Stay?* process does exactly that.

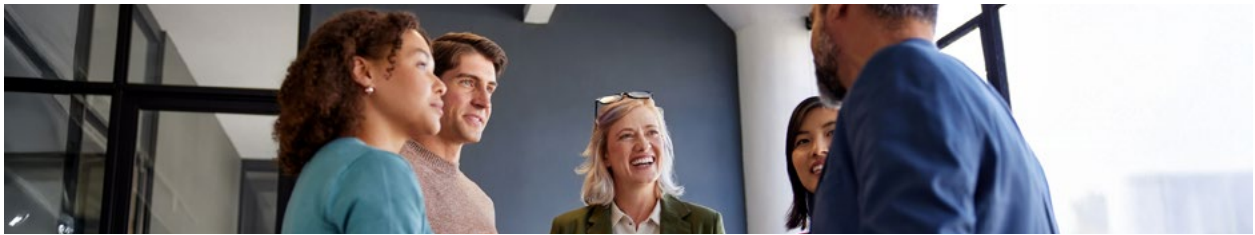
¹¹ Performance excellence is played out on the public stage; mediocrity lurks in the shadows. One is easy to identify. The other only becomes apparent when critical targets are missed.



a new executive struggles is their inability to adjust to the new culture. Readiness embraces not just fit for the culture the client has but the culture the organization needs to (must) create. It starts with cultural adjustment, but to be successful the newly hired leader has to quickly become a sponsor of the needed culture.

4. Without a strategic scorecard for the role (e.g., one, two and three years out), defining future success is the talent acquisition equivalent of playing darts blindfolded. Readiness without awareness is momentum without meaning.
5. “Leadership balance” is a central characteristic of meaningful, role-specific, **future-oriented**, leadership competencies. Leadership balance implies excellence in four leadership domains:
 - *Direction* – clearly outlining the journey ahead and identifying/engaging the talent needed to get there.
 - *Delivery* – consistently achieving results even as the environment continues to change.
 - *Development* – acting on the belief you can’t grow the business unless you grow the people/teams in the business.
 - *Day-to-day dialogue* – trust building, authenticity, fairness, inclusion and caring.





Because each supports the other, a leader who fails to deliver on any one of the four domains is falling short on them all.

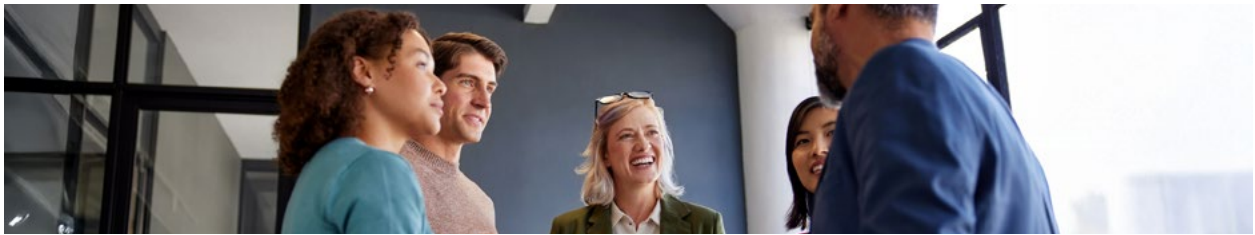
6. Great teams are the future of any great organization. If you measure team effectiveness (results and relationships), you're well on the way to managing the team you have and creating the team you need. As already highlighted, tomorrow's organization will be an AI-enabled team of teams.
7. Executives who don't land won't stay. Search firms that lack the material, expertise (e.g., coaching) and innovative processes to fully support executive integration are depriving their clients of future readiness.

Conclusion

The make or break nature of executive hiring can be found in four pragmatic realities. One: who an organization hires and/or promotes, ultimately, dictates what is possible. Two: identifying the candidate that stands out on the short list is relatively straightforward. Uncovering the *right* candidate is a challenge of an entirely different order. Three: wide-scale change demands leadership character. Talent is a gift; character is a choice. Character is, thus, not only difficult to define but for those who don't know what they are looking for, it is even more difficult to identify. Four: without broad-based leadership readiness, even the most highly regarded organizations are, as if, standing naked before the next (inevitable) hurricane.

*“I stood full of hubris knowing that even the best
of the competition had no shoes. That is, until
I looked down and realised that I had no feet.”*

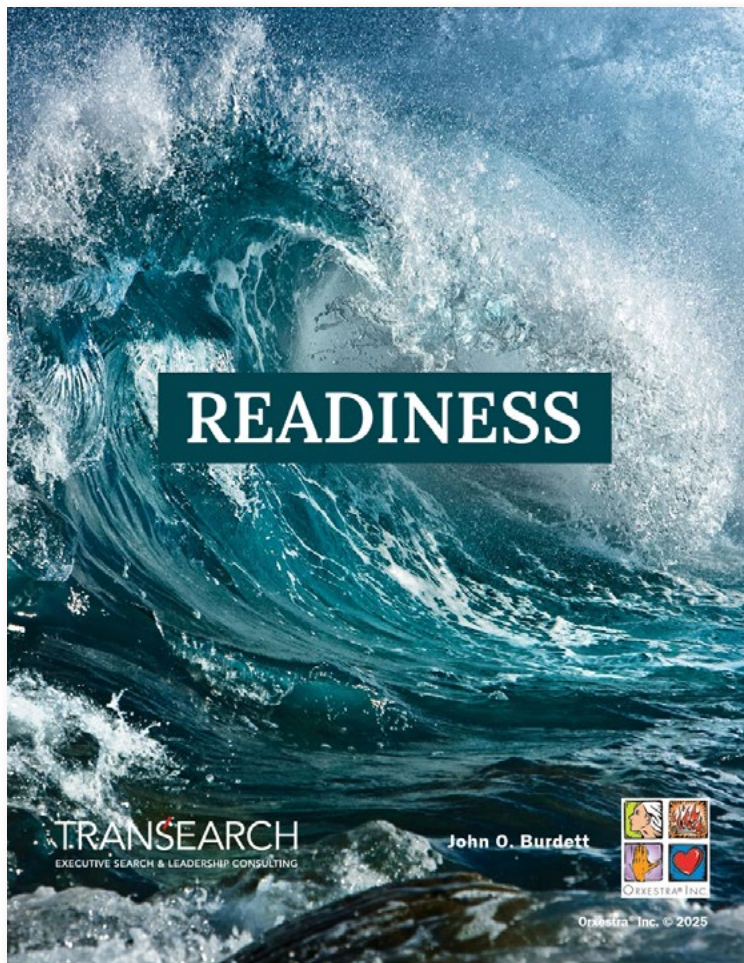
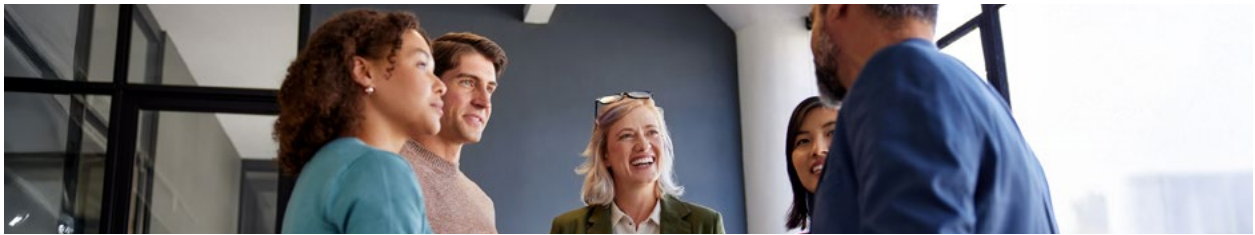
– Adapted from an Arab proverb



Key Questions

1. When faced with developing a business or strategic plan, Peter Drucker's favourite question was, "What business are we in?" If you are an executive search provider, what business are **you** in? Are you in the order-taking business where the overriding goal is to replace an executive who recently quit or was promoted? Or are you a full partner in the leadership readiness business?
2. Even though you are not in the executive search business, which of the talent acquisition imperatives and points of excellence apply directly to your business? Consider leadership development, coaching, internal promotions and executive succession.
3. If you are in a business development role and you see the advantages of transforming your customer relationships from cooperation (a transaction) to collaboration (value creation), what should you start to do differently tomorrow?
4. As a leader, what would make you a role model for leadership balance?
5. Recognising that tomorrow will be different, what do you need to do, beyond what you are already doing, to improve the readiness of your own team?





READINESS

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John O. Burdett

*“If nothing
changes
... nothing
changes.”*

- John O. Burdett

JOHN O. BURDETT has worked in over 40 countries as an executive and as a consultant for businesses that are household names. He continues to work on leadership development and organization culture for some of the world's largest corporations.

In 2019, his work with ABB's top 240 executives received a major international award for the most innovative leadership development initiative of that year. His ongoing partnership with TRANSEARCH International means that his proprietary work on talent acquisition, in any one year, successfully supports many hundreds of top leadership appointments on six continents.

He has written extensively on executive coaching and was awarded international coach of the year by the Finnish Institute of International Trade. Business graduates at the University of Texas indicated that his material on coaching was the single most valuable learning source they took away from their undergraduate degree. He has also coached numerous executive teams

around the world in how to coach. He currently coaches a select group of CEOs.

Apart from a range of corporate leadership workshops, he has taught at business schools on both sides of the Atlantic. His work on the MBA program at the University of Toronto received a teaching excellence award. John holds a doctorate in management development and is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development.

In addition to numerous business articles and twice being awarded article of the year by MCB publications, John has published 16 books on leadership, talent management, coaching and organization culture. A number of them bestsellers. His most recent book is a fully revised version of his international bestselling book on executive integration: *Without Breaking Stride*. To download his current business articles go to www.transearch.com/orxestra/downloads

