



# If the Shoe Fits

**STEVEN HOCHBERG**, Founder and President of Caliber Associates, explains why a cultural fit is a top priority in executive selection

“Management is doing things right; leadership is doing the right things.”

– Peter Drucker, renowned writer and consultant, regarded as the “father of modern management”

Selecting the right senior talent is one of the most important business decisions an organization can make, and a key determinant of future success. The right leader, as many of America’s top corporations have found, can mean the difference between a weak balance sheet or soaring revenues, and a work environment that is conducive to highly performing teams.

In choosing exemplary leaders, health and life science organizations would be wise to ensure that cultural fit remains a key factor in the candidate selection process. Most senior executives vying for strategic positions of leadership will come to the table with an impressive set of academic and prior work credentials, as well as a solid track record of growth and success. As such, the emphasis of the interview process should concentrate not only on the individual’s ability to perform in the position, but also on how well they will fit with your organization. Focusing on traits that will predict leadership success, such as interaction with top management,

peers and subordinates; communication skills and operating style, will likely increase the probability that an individual will be a successful performer in your organization.

As an executive search firm that has placed hundreds of senior leaders over the last 20 years, we have found that an executive’s style and ability to mesh with the current culture is a major determinant of their future success or failure. The ability to be quickly accepted and integrated into a new organization gets the executive off to a positive start and lays the groundwork for a flourishing tenure. Such excellent placements are usually accomplished by organizations which ensure that cultural fit is an integrated and important part of their company’s selection process.

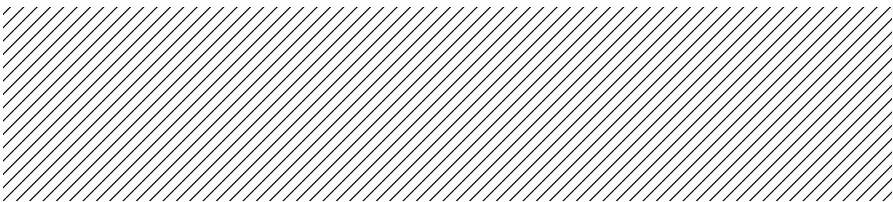
Ensuring this element starts with an organization recognizing the key attributes of their culture, so they can ensure the candidate will gel with their environment. Every organization has a formal and informal culture. This represents a unique way of getting things done and a set of behaviors that differentiate companies from their competition. The key challenge is how well it is articulated and understood. Defining the key

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cultural attributes desired in a candidate should be a central element of discussion when assembling the selection team, along with the traditional aspects, such as defining the position’s role and scope of responsibilities.

It’s particularly important for the people participating in the interview process to have a clear understanding of what makes their work environment unique and what attributes are important in their company. This will help them gauge how well a candidate will fit with those attributes.

Some factors for an organization to consider in defining their cultural expectations include: What defines success or failure at their organization? What are the behaviors that are going to work well? What’s the pace of work, the level of formality or informality? Does the organization have a more hierarchal or flat management structure? Is risk-taking rewarded? Is the decision-making process consensus-driven or individually driven? Having a real handle on such issues is very important, and will greatly enhance the probability of a new executive’s success. Prior to candidate interviews, the selection team or Human Resources (HR) leader should identify a list of key attributes and styles that would represent a good fit for the position being filled. This list should take into account the corporate culture on a macro level, as well as unique elements of subculture within the department or division the position lies. The focus of individual interviews should be to identify evidence of past behaviors that are supportive of a candidate’s ability to fit into the company. Targeted and focused questioning should occur in order to paint a complete picture of how an individual thinks, acts and behaves. This output should be compared to the desired behaviors and traits previously established. **FH**



**SOME OTHER TIPS TO KEEP IN MIND**

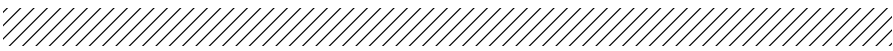
**WELCOME OPPOSING OPINIONS** CEOs and Presidents should encourage their HR leader, other management team members or their executive search partner to provide strategic evaluation and input on a candidate’s cultural fit, even if that feedback challenges their own views. Opposing views should be welcomed and weighed in the overall selection process.

**IT IS A TWO-WAY EXCHANGE** During the interview process, making an effort to convey the company’s culture to a prospective executive will help the candidate gauge whether he or she will feel comfortable there. For example, some organizations may operate in a casual environment with little support staff, while the candidate may be accustomed to a highly structured hierarchal environment, with a heavy emphasis on support. Such a candidate may not flourish in a casual environment and should understand up front the new company’s style of management and support staff parameters, so they can consider this in making their decision about joining the new organization.

**SEEK FEEDBACK FROM EMPLOYEES AT VARIOUS LEVELS** It is critically important to see how a potential new leader interacts with all levels of employees during the selection process. It’s often a good idea to get feedback from administrative assistants, receptionists and peers, in addition to discussions with senior management, regarding their interactions with the executive candidate.

**USE THE INTERVIEW PROCESS TO HELP PINPOINT GAPS IN CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING AT YOUR OWN ORGANIZATION** It’s important for interviewers to have a deep understanding of their company culture. One way to check this is to be the last person in the company to interview a candidate. This provides a chance to hear from the candidate how the interviewers conveyed the unique aspects of the company’s culture, which enables identification of variations regarding company culture among the various management team members who participate in the selection process.

**SELECT THE SHOE THAT FITS BEST.** In a highly competitive environment for top talent, there will always be several strong candidates to consider. While a number of factors will figure into your decision, keep in mind that the cultural fit should remain among your top priorities, as this is often the most significant predictor of success or failure for executives in a senior management role.



**STEVEN HOCHBERG** is Founder and President of Caliber Associates, an executive search firm specializing in the life sciences industry. An accomplished leader in the field, Mr. Hochberg has personally completed over 500 searches, representing major clients in biotechnology, global and specialty pharmaceuticals, diagnostics, medical devices and the pharmaceutical services industries. He founded Caliber Associates in 1988, and has built it into an extremely successful firm, with offices located on both coasts serving clientele nationwide. Mr. Hochberg earned his bachelor’s degree from Cornell University and holds a master’s degree in organizational development from the University of Pennsylvania. For more information, visit [www.caliberassociates.com](http://www.caliberassociates.com)