



## Thought Leadership

# Why Your Company Needs a Chief Recruitment Officer

**You need someone who's tenacious and aggressive to head up recruiting -- and such people are hard to find in HR.**

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The idea of a chief recruitment officer is surprisingly controversial, at least among human resource professionals. The HR world has only recently won a seat in the C-suite, with a handful of companies creating a chief human resources officer role. Many see the CRO and CHRO roles as virtually identical, and asserting that they are fundamentally different is like poking a wasp's nest.

However, the difference is too important not to poke. The best recruiters in a competitive talent market are tenacious, driven, even aggressive. It's a mindset that's closer to business development and sales: taking a value proposition to market and bringing something new into the company. At the same time, imagine trying to mediate an employee-relations issue with that mindset.

To be clear, I am not undervaluing the role HR plays in a successful business. But HR is more about analyzing, processing, tracking and developing the talent your business already has. For the most part, HR professionals are nurturing and patient -- the perfect temperament for building cross-functional collaboration and developing organizational culture. You need that.

But if a seat opens up, I want a team of recruiters who are all waving their hands, saying, "I'll fill it! Give me that project!" I want their eyes to shine like lion eyes do when you dangle a raw steak. Then I know they'll work that recruitment project hard -- cold calling, networking, blanketing social media, scouring databases. When HR professionals see a raw steak, their first thought is about employee health and safety.

The CRO, then, should head up a stand-alone recruiting department and shape a culture that's like *Mad Men*, or even *Game of Thrones*. The CRO's main responsibility should be to create a team of



highly motivated, results-driven recruiters and reward them for excellent -- not just good -- recruitment. The metrics may be different from company to company, but it's about much more than just time to fill, it's also about filling the seat with the right person.

Some will push back, using the shortsighted argument that HR and recruitment are cost centers and don't justify a C-level salary. Step back and look at the bigger picture, though: An empty seat costs your company money, while the right talent in that seat helps generate revenue and profit. In a competitive market, you need (1) to track down and entice the talent and (2) to make that talent feel welcomed, recognized and rewarded. Both efforts mitigate cost and promote revenue and profit, but it's not realistic to think that the people who excel at one will excel at the other. The groups see the world through different lenses.

Just the same, if your company isn't big enough to justify a stand-alone department, consider housing recruitment in sales or marketing. That way, they're breathing the same air as your wheeler-dealers, your buzz generators, your champion closers. Whenever I share this idea, the response tends to be swift and definitive: HR professionals don't like it. But ask yourself this: Would you switch members of your sales team with members of your HR team? Of course not. It's not a critique, it's just a recognition that success in each area calls for a unique temperament.

For the best HR professionals, risk management is second nature. In contrast, the recruitment temperament is one that works the angles and dances on the edge. Here's an example: A hiring manager at a construction company in Hawaii was frustrated by not being able to attract the right talent. He claimed he didn't have the right carrot to dangle. But a little probing revealed that he and his crew work in the morning, take an hour and a half to eat lunch and surf, and then go back to work in the afternoon . . . all while still on the clock.

That's a huge, juicy carrot! "We pay you to surf. And we also hammer some nails." His face lit up like a luau torch. Could an HR professional have recognized how to work that angle? Sure. But to foster that kind of thinking day in and day out, you need a specific atmosphere. So even if you're not able to pull recruitment out of HR, make sure your CRO carves out a distinct cultural niche in which dancing on the edge is rewarded.

In addition to leading the team on a day-to-day basis, the CRO has an important role to play at the leadership table -- I like to call it the war room. Say the leaders are looking at the 12-month forecast, and the VP of sales is confident about bringing in orders for a thousand new widgets. What do you need? The right financing and the right staff power. The CFO works out the money, and the CRO strategizes on how to get the right people. Your CRO needs the big-picture vision to create the staffing strategy, but even more importantly, he or she needs a track record of executing on that strategy. Other C-level executives may be 75 percent dreamer and 25 percent doer, but your CRO needs some serious git-'er-done chops, especially in today's talent market.

Whatever the structure, your CRO needs a distinctive background. Obviously he or she will need deep recruitment expertise as well as management and leadership skills. But you'll also want to see a proven ability to motivate performance, build teams, and recognize and reward success. She or he should have the same high-energy, entrepreneurial drive that you want the recruiters to have. If this sounds like the profile of your VP of Sales, I'm making my point.

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