

# **AESC Researchers/Associates Certification Competencies**

The required competencies to be certified as an AESC Researcher/Associate are taught in:

1. A combination of AESC's Online Courses and Expert Forums
2. Or approved equivalent in-house training
3. Or at least five year's experience within the retained executive search profession
4. Or a combination of the above.

The mastery of the competencies will be assessed in three ways:

1. An online exam
2. An oral exam
3. A letter of reference from the individual's immediate supervisor (after having had at least 2 years of experience with a retained executive search firm)

**Below are some definitions that you may find useful.**

**Litmus Test:** consists of a series of 4 – 6 experiences someone must have in their background in order to be qualified for a position. Sometimes referred to as the gold standard or acid test.

**Source:** a knowledge expert who can recommend qualified executives or, at the very least, can suggest where to look for them.

**Prospect:** someone who you call because you believe he or she will become either a candidate or a source.

**Candidate:** someone who is qualified and interested in your search.

**Pitch:** the way that you present your search to prospects and sources.

## **Acting in an Ethical Professional Manner**

The ability to

- Understand and abide by the AESC Code of Ethics and Professional Practice Guidelines
- Understand and abide by legal requirements

## **Working With The Consultant**

The ability to:

- Understand the division of responsibilities, deadlines and deliverables agreed upon with the consultant and honor them

- Communicate progress with the consultant in the agreed-upon mode and timeframe
- Obtain necessary information about the client and position
- Get agreement from the consultant on the 4-6 experiences that will define excellence (litmus test/acid test)
- Realign strategy when necessary
- Know when to defer to the consultant to solve prospect/source/candidate issues
- Present solutions to problems when possible
- Listen carefully to candidate concerns, diagnose the problem and report to the consultant
- Quantify and report results in a well organized and objective manner noting gray areas to probe and allowing for comparison of prospects
- Follow the search progress noting details and be able to handle questions from the client/candidate

### **Researching a Business Development Proposal**

The ability to

- Research and organize prior relevant search firm experience in the sector and role
- Research the potential client/role/ and marketplace
- Develop with the consultant a potential search strategy

### **Designing a Research Strategy Once the Firm has the Mandate**

The ability to:

- Compile comprehensive information about the client company, the position to be filled, and the desired candidate profile
- Gather internal and external resources
- Understand job functions, compensation ranges, and industry jargon in your “search space”
- Define the position in terms of 4-6 critical experiences the prospect must have to be qualified for the job (litmus test/acid test)
- Employ internet resources like Hoovers, Google and Company Websites to develop a list of appropriate companies and then apply the litmus test to see if they qualify for the target list
- Develop a potential target list of companies/organizations where the excellent prospect might currently be working based on client requests, competitors, research and previous searches.
- Apply the litmus test/acid test to make sure that that the target companies meet the essential requirements
- Insure that search firm and client “off limits” restrictions are not compromised when developing the target list
- Prioritize the target list
- Balance the size of the target company with the size of the client company to determine where in the targeted company’s organization structure the prospect will be

- Identify a group of experts or sources, who by virtue of what they do, offer the expertise to direct you to prospects and augment your knowledge of the universe
- Test your search strategy and redefine it when initial calls are not yielding prospects
- Meet deadlines for deliverables

### **Showcasing the Firm and Client In the Best Light**

The ability to

- Represent the firm and enhance its reputation in the marketplace by behaving ethically and professionally in every interaction with gatekeepers, sources, prospects, candidates and references
- Represent your client's interests in every interaction with gatekeepers, sources, prospects, candidates and references

### **Knowledge Management**

The ability to

- Systematically capture, organize and retain information throughout the search process so that it is available to the entire firm

### **Name Generation**

The ability to:

- Find relevant professional associations which are linked to conferences, speakers and awards which might yield potential sources and prospects
- Employ internet resources like Hoovers, Google, BlueSteps.com, and Company Websites to learn about your target companies and generate leads to identify names/prospects
- Identify a universe of prospects and sources to advise you about your search and lead you to companies and prospects (getting full names and titles and, where possible, reporting relationships, developing partial organization charts for the target list of companies)
- Capture competitive intelligence about your client (information you learn about the company, the industry/marketplace, and the thought leaders in the industry)
- Understand titles and functions as they relate to your search for candidates and prospects
- Develop rapport with gatekeepers
- Elicit information by asking for help and viewing gatekeepers as knowledgeable experts
- Acquire information without lying/rusing
- Answer questions truthfully and professionally
- Answer only the question being asked in a simple narrow manner, choosing your words carefully, and preparing answers for frequently asked questions.
- Keep control of a call, and if possible, get some information from every call & interaction

- Take information you have, verify it, and expand upon it
- Understand the situation from the point of view of the person you are speaking with, acknowledge their resistance and try to get another type of information
- Ascertain who might have the information you need and call them (departments that help people like CEOs office, investor relations, sales etc.)
- Prioritize your prospects and sources and present them in segments for validation of search strategy in order to insure that your research is heading in the right direction
- Change directions if you determine that your target list is not generating the right prospects and sources

### **Getting Past the Gate Keeper**

The ability to

- Develop rapport with the gatekeeper understanding and respecting their role
- Represent yourself and your mission in a clear, succinct, professional manner without lying/ rusing
- Leave appropriate messages with the gatekeeper that indicate you want to speak with their boss as a source on your search
- Leave clear, succinct voicemail messages that sufficiently peak the interest of the executive to return your call and that respect their privacy
- Construct e mails that pitch the search and treat prospects as sources in order to respect their privacy

### **Pitching**

The ability to

- Ascertain and customize for each prospect/source the compelling feature of the search that will make it attractive and convince the executive to spend time hearing about the search
- Develop a different approach/pitch depending on who you are calling: a source, a prospect or an “either/or” situation
- Personalize the call so the executive knows why you are calling *them*
- Introduce and deliver the pitch clearly, succinctly, with energy and conviction
- Present the search openly and honestly
- Listen carefully to the prospect to gauge the effectiveness of the pitch and determine next steps
- Emphasize the opportunity the search presents
- Showcase your firm, yourself and your client in the best possible light
- Transition from pitching to qualifying or sourcing

### **Sourcing**

The ability to

- Identify a group of experts who, by virtue of what they do, can assist you in your search
- Stimulate enough interest, so the source is willing to talk to you about the search

- Use the 4-6 critical experiences/litmus test/acid test to explain what you are looking for
- Clearly ask for and elicit knowledge from a source about your client, the marketplace, relevant associations, compensation ranges and get referrals to target companies and prospects
- Capture competitive intelligence about your client (information you learn about the company, the industry/marketplace, and the thought leaders in the industry)
- Ask the source directed questions to help them “help you”
- Probe why they are referring a prospect and analyze the response to determine if you should follow-up
- Ascertain why the source is hesitant to give you information and address the issue and, if possible, reassure them not to be concerned
- Build a relationship with the source by being interested in and curious about them
- Develop a follow-up strategy with the source for the end of the call; end of search and long term
- Transition from a sourcing call to a qualifying call if the source “raises his/her hand”

### **Qualifying prospects, eliciting information about current compensation and determining interest in the search**

The ability to

- Analyze a resume to determine if a prospect has the 4-6 critical experiences that define excellence (litmus test/acid test) and rate the answers noting areas to probe in telephone outreach
- Smoothly transition from the pitch to qualifying the prospect
- Control a call in order to elicit the essential information
- Ask open ended questions to learn if the prospect has the necessary 4-6 experiences (litmus test/acid test) and evaluate and score/record answers
- Get education and career chronology information
- Listen for objections, acknowledge them and either address them or ask permission to put them aside for the moment and come back to them at a later time
- Understand the fundamentals of executive compensation; base salary, bonus, short/long term incentives, benefits and perquisites
- Understand the client’s constraints (compression, peer issues) and flexibility (numbers/components) around the compensation for the position
- Learn about the prospect’s current compensation package (all components)
- Answer questions posed by the prospect about the compensation for the position in several different ways without giving the actual numbers
- Evaluate prospect’s interest and motivation in the position based on answers to questions and behavior
- Create an environment that encourages open dialogue
- Conclude a call; either smoothly transitioning from a prospect call to a source call if the prospect doesn’t have the necessary experience or outlining next steps in the search process for the qualified and interested prospect/candidate clearly delineating what you will do and what you expect them to do

- Identify unclear or missing information that is necessary to qualify a prospect and follow-up to attain it
- Determine when to delay a decision about whether a prospect is qualified and leave the door open to further discussion.
- Compare and rank prospects based on their experiences and background

### **Background checking**

The ability to:

- Understand the definitions listed in the AESC Steps to Effective Reference and Background Checking
- Explicitly agree and document with the consultant and client what scope & level of diligence is appropriate and who will be responsible for which background checks; the search firm, client or third party
- Legally obtain candidate permission to perform background and reference checking (beyond the scope of the candidate's list)

### **Referencing**

The ability to:

- Identify the key players in the candidate's career during calls & interviews
- Elicit from the candidate a list of references including superiors, peers, subordinates, and analyze the list to see who is included/missing and augment where necessary, both initially and as you progress with referencing
- Maintain candidate confidentiality throughout the process
- Prepare for the reference call by familiarizing yourself with the candidate's work history and the requirements of the position
- Establish rapport and create a positive, professional, courteous impression and confirm the confidentiality of the process
- Understand the relationship and history of the reference with the candidate
- Ask only questions which are legal
- Be an aggressive listener and remain in control of the call
- Ask closed ended questions to verify facts and open ended questions to evaluate: performance, skills and proficiencies; interpersonal skills and integrity; and motivation, career development and potential
- Elicit from the reference positives and negatives within the framework of the requirements of the job
- Ask for details where information is unclear
- Call additional references when you haven't yet verified what you know and gotten a comprehensive picture or when you want to clear up discrepancies
- Learn from the reference if there are additional people to call
- Analyze all references and put together a comprehensive report noting areas for development the client might want to address.
- Respond appropriately when asked by a candidate not chosen for the job about his referencing

## **Managing the Candidate**

The ability to:

- Listen carefully to a candidate's concerns and try to diagnose the problem
- Gather feed-back after candidate interviews with the consultant and the client
- Answer candidate questions about next steps
- Close out rejected candidates in a timely manner on the telephone or in person in a manner that keeps your relationship intact