



AESC Candidate Bill of Rights

In general, *recruiting* calls are a frequent annoyance for executive-level professionals—but a call from an *executive search* firm is quite another matter.

What's the Difference?

Executive Search firms such as members of the Association of Executive Search and Leadership Consultants (AESC) are specialized management consultants retained on an exclusive basis by clients in an advisory capacity to identify, assess and select the very best possible candidate. To be sure a candidate is fully vetted, these firms employ highly sophisticated methodologies and due diligence processes that may be augmented by psychometric testing and broader assessments. Their success is defined by the long-term commitment and impact of the person hired, therefore they are motivated to help secure a lasting, successful executive hire for their client.

Contingent recruiters present to clients a pool of candidates that fit certain criteria. A contingent recruiter generally works the front-end of the process, leaving the assessment and selection work to the client. They seek to place as many candidates as possible in the shortest possible time and tend to work with many assignments concurrently. If a particular assignment is not getting traction, contingent recruiters have little incentive to continue as they are not retained by the client or working on the assignment on an exclusive basis. Contingent recruiters are most often used for mid-level positions or positions where there are a large number of qualified candidates. They tend to focus on candidates actively looking for a new role, and positions that have much lower risk associated with a failed placement.

Why should candidates care about the type of firm?

Agreeing to become a candidate could put executives at a certain amount of risk with their current employers if not handled with the utmost confidentiality. Knowing the difference between executive search and contingent recruiting is essential in protecting their current positions, safely exploring new opportunities, and ensuring a strong likelihood of success if a position is offered.

- *Executive search consultants* are retained by clients on an exclusive basis to search for an individual who meets very specific criteria, to fill a carefully defined organizational role. They are focused on finding the perfect fit in a candidate who will succeed over the long-term.
- Candidates who are contacted by an executive search firm have an opportunity to be helpful and build a career-long relationship with a search consultant even if they are not interested or are not the right candidate.
- *Contingent recruiters* do not have an exclusive arrangement with clients. Their role is to gather and present resumes, and not to carefully assess candidates against client expectations.
- Candidates who are contacted by contingent recruiters may find themselves presented for positions that are not a strong fit, or shopped to multiple clients who may or may not have a current need, risking exposure.

What should candidates expect from an executive search firm?

The growing number of firms and individuals declaring themselves to be professional executive search consultants has created the need for candidates to be especially diligent when responding to anyone claiming to be an executive search consultant. The shortest possible route to absolute confidence that you are speaking with a trusted firm is to determine whether the firm is a member of AESC. If so, the candidate can be assured that the firm has been carefully vetted and subscribes to the highest ethics and standards in the profession. What are your rights and obligations as a candidate? You can expect the following from an AESC member search firm:

I. Full Disclosure: Once you have been identified as a candidate for an executive position, the firm/consultant will provide full and open disclosure regarding:

- The nature and requirements of the position.
- Whether relocation is required.
- Pertinent information regarding the client organization.
- Whether the search firm has been retained by the client on an exclusive basis.

II. Exclusivity: The firm/consultant has an exclusive agreement with the client organization, authorized by the client to find an individual who is a precise fit for a specific position. Without this exclusive agreement, executive level candidates could find their resumes floated to random clients, or as part of a large pool of undifferentiated candidates.

III. Confidentiality: The unintended disclosure of an executive's interest in a new position can be highly disruptive—even catastrophic. The executive search firm/consultant protects the confidentiality of the candidate's interest and other information, by:

- Obtaining authorization before releasing the candidate's name and credentials to the client organization so that the candidate can provide informed consent.
- Only contacting candidate provided references with their expressed permission.
- Cautioning the client to also protect the candidate's confidentiality.
- Being discreet when contacting the candidate, doing so directly, and not through an assistant or anyone else at the candidate's current employer.
- Never discussing a candidate except as authorized.
- Continuing to protect the candidate's confidential information even after the process is completed.

IV. Communication: Because of the high-stakes nature of senior executive turnover, an executive search assignment frequently takes several months. Out of respect for the candidate, the search consultant will provide timely progress updates as the search progresses, and will be responsive to candidate inquiries. The consultant will also provide an honest appraisal of where the candidate does and does not seem to be a fit, and will be forthcoming if the client chooses to end the individual's candidacy.

V. Professionalism: Executive search assignments are conducted at the highest levels, and candidates for these roles have pressing demands on their time. A professional firm or consultant will treat every candidate with professionalism, by:

- Respecting a candidate's time, position and professional responsibilities.
- Providing adequate process details including the position description, the client's timeframe, and the various steps to be taken as the process unfolds.

- Being on time and prepared for appointments.
- Conducting an organized, well thought-out interview.
- Providing communication that is consistent with the client.
- Serving as an honest, candid intermediary during the highly sensitive negotiation of an employment agreement.
- Never putting undue pressure on a candidate who has been made an offer.

Building relationships

The relationship with a professional search consultant is not necessarily over at the conclusion of an assignment. A natural result of an involved search process is that relationships develop between search consultants and candidates, especially when consultants conduct themselves in a manner befitting the principles of AESC. For an unsuccessful or uninterested candidate, the relationship could lead to other opportunities. For the successful candidate, the consultant will serve in the crucial role of intermediary during the negotiation of the employment agreement, and will be there to help through the transition into the new role.

Candidates helping themselves

Top executive search firms are committed to helping their clients access a robust and diverse field of candidates to make the best decision possible. Ultimately the decision is a matter of fit, but a candidate can take steps to advance his or her standing and ensure the right decision is made regarding his or her candidacy. Those steps include:

- Disclosing an accurate work history, and being honest and forthright about reasons for changes in roles throughout career.
- Being candid about strengths and areas that need improvement.
- Expressing truthfully their level of interest (or lack thereof) and relevant experience for the position.
- Maintaining flexibility with regard to appointments, interviews, and the entire search process.
- Respecting the client organization's confidentiality.
- Understanding that the process takes time, and that several qualified candidates are under consideration.
- Negotiating in good faith.

Conclusion

Many candidates find the search process very rewarding, regardless of the outcome. With the guidance of a top executive search firm, candidates have the chance to explore their own interests and aptitudes, and even hone their interview and negotiation skills. In the end, it's always a win. A candidate either has a new challenge within a new organization, or has become a known entity to a reputable search firm, which could open other doors.

AESC provides a wealth of additional information for candidates, including career consultation and online executive seminars through its career management service for senior executives, [BlueSteps](#). Executives who register with BlueSteps can also create a strictly confidential career profile, visible only to top executive search firms worldwide.

Learn more about executive search at [AESC.org](#) or [BlueSteps.com](#)