

# Association TRENDS

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## The **7** DEADLY SINS of exec recruiting

The many examples of corporate fraud and malfeasance during the past year highlight the importance of good hiring practices and conducting due diligence on new execs.

Could better hiring practices have prevented these debacles? Maybe, maybe not.

But due diligence and good hiring practices never go out of style; they're important all the time for dozens of reasons.

Leonard Pfeiffer IV, an exec recruiter and founder of Leonard Pfeiffer & Co., Washington, has identified the "7 deadly sins of exec recruiting" and gives advice on how to avoid them:

### 1. Not completely checking references.

So you called the 3 references provided by the candidate, you say? Well, Attila the Hun could provide 3 good references! To get a complete picture, your research should include a "360 degree" reference check, including at least 2 former bosses, 2 peers, and 2 staff who worked for the person. Is it easy to find and talk to these people while protecting confidentiality? Not always, especially in a tight-knit industry. But a 3rd party can accomplish this more easily.

### 2. Not conducting enough due diligence.

What other due diligence do you conduct on candidates? Did you run a credit check? Independently verify past employment and titles, degrees and other information listed on the résumé? Talk to people with trade journals in the industry where the person works to see if they know the person or reported on them.

**3. Considering only those candidates who apply.** Are the best people in your business looking for jobs when your position opens up? Probably not. Can you call competitors and speak to their best people while they are happily employed? Of course not. But that's what exec recruiters do all the time. They protect the confidentiality of employers and candidates alike, allowing good people to learn about and consider new opportunities and "make decisions when the sun is shining," instead of the other way around.

### 4. Not conducting an extensive search.

Hiring execs is hard work! It's not easy to find the best people, and unless you are the HR professional in your organization, it takes time away from your regular job. So it's tempting to advertise in all the usual

places, call a few colleagues, and hire the first good person who comes along. But today's market often dictates that searches should be nationwide, or even global.

**5. Hiring the wrong skill set.** Do you need an exec who's strategic or tactical? Are entrepreneurial skills important? Will the person be creating new programs from scratch or maintaining and growing existing operations? Will the exec inherit a disgruntled staff or build a new team? Will the person report to a boss who spells out specific instructions or someone who gives the exec free rein to lead and make decisions? Each of these situations requires different leadership and thinking skills. If a team of people is doing the hiring, each of them also has a different view of what the ideal candidate looks like and sounds like. Given these variables, it's not surprising that a candidate with the wrong skill set is often hired, which helps no one, least of all the new exec.

**6. Placing too much emphasis on one opinion.** Sometimes a candidate appears perfect, and all the references check out except for one. Do you eliminate the candidate based on that one negative review? Certainly it calls for additional due diligence to gain a complete picture, but it's the rare person who is loved by everyone. Find out what's behind this one person's opinion and why they might have a reason to bash the candidate. On the flip side, don't put too much stock in a glowing report that doesn't jive with other references.

**7. Giving the internal candidate short shrift.** OK, so maybe you think Joe or Jane isn't the right person for your open position. Maybe you're right. But they're on your team, and they play highly influential roles, formally and informally, in the operations of your assn and the morale of your staff. Treat them right. Give them every consideration and show them the full respect that every candidate deserves. They might even surprise you and show you skills you didn't know they had — making them viable candidates or opening doors to other positions within your organization. If they aren't selected and know and understand the reasons why, they can accept it. If there's any perception by them or other staff that they were unjustly passed over, everyone loses — especially the new exec you hired.

Details: [www.pfeiffercompany.com](http://www.pfeiffercompany.com).