

The CEO Advantage: Get Buy-in Before Adding to your Executive Team

By Nancy MacKay, Ph.D

CEO challenge:

The CEO of a high-growth company had just completed a successful acquisition and wanted to ensure the new addition was well integrated into the organization. At the same time, he needed to free up his time to continue working the company's growth strategy so he decided to expand the executive team with a new COO role. Up to this point, the group had consisted of a CFO, CIO and vice-presidents of human resources as well as sales and marketing.

The CEO was introduced to a rock star candidate through an industry colleague. They met and the CEO was impressed, eventually inviting the potential executive to meet with the team to see if he would be a good fit.

Much to his surprise, when he announced the plan, he got significant resistance from each person and was told the role would interfere with the ability of the organization to move forward.

The result: a complete loss of trust in the CEO by the executive team members.

CEO mistake:

The CEO had made three critical mistakes. First, he did not explain at the outset why he felt a COO role was necessary to set the team up for greater success.

He also did not give the other executives the opportunity to have a say in the decision and to help with the development of the role to ensure there were clear interdependencies with other management functions.

Lastly, he did not give anyone on his team the opportunity to express his or her own interest in the new role before he began recruiting.

CEO solution:

Leaders must follow the principle that strategy drives structure and role clarity. At the outset, our CEO should have explained the thinking behind the need to change the team structure and then defined the new role and its responsibilities.

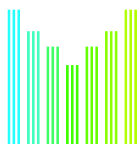
In clarifying a new job, it is important to seek the input of each team member individually. Give all executives an opportunity to discuss the business outcomes of the new position and then work together as a team to finalize the role description.

In order to identify the best recruiting process for the new role, discuss the pros and cons of doing an internal search versus working with an external recruiter and demonstrate that a key position such as a COO will require the help of external experts.

And to retain top talent, give anyone on the team who wishes to apply for the new job the opportunity to do so, provided they have the required skills, behaviours and experience to deliver results.

Finally, to further minimize resistance, give everyone the chance to participate in the recruiting process, including meeting potential candidates and having input to the final selection decision.

In this case it took the CEO three months to rebuild his team and earn back his colleagues' trust. By that time, the original COO candidate was long gone and the firm wisely sought external recruiting help. Four months later, a COO candidate was finally hired. •



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