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## EMPOWERING THE FUTURE OF CARE

# 8 Recommendations to Improve Leadership Candidate Experience

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Even prior to COVID-19, recruiting healthcare administrative and physician executives was challenging. The pandemic's many disruptions exacerbated the situation and erected new obstacles. Consistent success in placing leaders now demands skillful management of multiple components of the recruiting process. This Industry Report focuses on candidate experience, an increasingly important variable in the search process equation. Based on AMN Healthcare's research and extensive experience, the report assesses the current issues and offers eight practical strategies to enhance a candidate's overall experience and sentiment.

# Challenging Talent Acquisition Environment

Key defining characteristics of today's talent acquisition environment include:

## A highly competitive market

A confluence of factors is escalating competition for talent at all levels, including the executive suite. This year's AMN Physician and Leadership Solutions Trends survey quantified several aspects of the issue:

**43%**
of responding organizations cited moderate or high leadership shortages

**41%**
found it extremely or very challenging to attract quality executive candidates

**39%**
said recruiting is now national rather than just local

**46%**
of leaders expect to pursue a job move in the next twelve months, signaling a sense of mobility and posing retention risk

## Need for organizations to differentiate themselves

One implication of the competitive landscape is that organizations need to delineate clearly their distinct advantages and convey them effectively to candidates. Providers cannot rely on traditional perceptions in the face of shifting industry dynamics, growing complexity of health systems, and new organizational relationships and roles.

## Brand assumes greater importance

An employer brand encapsulates the mission, values and benefits associated with working at the organization. Some refer to it as an "employee value proposition." An effective employer brand strengthens an organization's reputation, enhancing the ability to attract leaders. Experts counsel that employer brands should be:

- **Credible and supported by evidence.**

- **Current, not stale.**

- **Visible to all candidates.** Beyond public statements, brand is conveyed through subtle messages delivered during the candidate's journey and interaction with the institution.

# The Vital Role of Candidate Experience

Organizations are increasingly recognizing that the competitive talent market places a high premium on effectively managing candidate relationships. As one analysis concludes, "Delivering a poor recruiting experience does far more damage than simply give one candidate a negative impression of your company. It can cause lasting reputational harm and even hurt your chances of hiring the workers who are hardest to find."[2]

Well-executed candidate experience management showcases organizational culture and intangible factors often given substantial weight by leaders in job decisions. A cross-industry executive survey found 33% of C-suite candidates would accept a pay cut to work for a mission-driven firm strongly aligned with their ideals.[2]

As a critical success factor, candidate experience should be approached with the same rigor as role definition and scope, compensation, and other core elements of talent acquisition.

# Candidate Experience Part of a Larger Strategic Imperative

In recent years, patients have demanded greater choice, convenience, and communication in their healthcare experiences. A growing number of job candidates have been echoing this "consumerist" mindset. As providers rapidly adopt holistic, enterprise-level strategies designed to improve patient experience, it is a logical extension to include candidates in this effort.

Two pillars of patient experience strategy deserve attention in candidate experience:

**Creating personalized experiences.** "Tomorrow's healthcare experience will be built by patients tailoring their own experience," observes a leading consulting firm.[3] Another analyst says patients have "come to expect an experience that's suited to their unique history, behaviors, and preferences."[4] IDC predicts that by 2024, "30% of chronic care patients will … leverage their personal health information to advocate for, secure, and realize better personalized care."[5] Similar expectations motivate today's leadership job candidates, and several of the recommendations in the following section contribute to personalization.

**Building trust.** Health systems, hospitals, and practices share a requirement with most companies, namely, "an imperative to build trust and transparency among different stakeholder groups — employees, customers, suppliers, regulators and the communities in which they operate."[6] A LinkedIn analysis observed, "Employers and employees are building a new, more dynamic relationship based on trust and empathy."[7] Extending this relationship to candidates, especially senior executives, can breed acquisition success.

# Recommendations to Improve Candidate Experience

Creating a consistently positive candidate experience requires execution of a set of procedural and personal actions. AMN's experience implementing best practices suggests eight pragmatic recommendations.

## 1 Select the right recruiting partner

Today's high-stakes, complex leadership recruiting makes partnering with the right executive search firm a competitive advantage. The ideal partner is well-established and couples solid behind-the-scenes process discipline with adeptness conveying a positive external image for the hiring organization. The recruiter is strongly positioned to help shape the overall candidate experience.

1. PwC, *Future of Recruiting Survey*, 2019.
2. Ibid.
3. Accenture, *The Health Experience Reimagined*, 2021.
4. O. Adigozel and K. Wilson, "Delivering on the Promise of Personalization in Health Care," *Boston Consulting Group blog*, April 1, 2022.
5. IDC, FutureScape: *Worldwide Healthcare Industry 2022*, November 2021.
6. PwC, *Pulse Survey: Managing Business Risks*, August 2022
7. LinkedIn Talent Solutions, "The Reinvention of Company Culture," *2022 Global Talent Trends*, January 2022.

Essential partner qualities include:

- A successful long-term recruiting track record.

- National reach and a broad network of executive contacts across healthcare domains and specialties. These contacts should encompass "passive" candidates, those not currently seeking new positions. AMN's 2022 Trends survey found that 46% of leaders were contemplating a move within twelve months, while 71% of those not in the market would consider a change for the "right opportunity." Among the latter, 72% said they were approached with a recent credible opportunity, and 21% pursued it.

- Proficiency in guiding internal hiring personnel and ensuring adherence to critical requirements, such as avoiding breach of confidentiality in academic medical center search committees.

## 2  Devise reasonable schedules

Avoiding protracted searches removes disruption for all participants and eliminates a common source of dissatisfaction for candidates. Also beneficial is allowing sufficient lead time when scheduling interviews. Too often, available dates are offered with just two weeks' notice. Finally, on interview days, there is a tendency to put candidates through back-to-back interviews. In addition to inducing stress and fatigue, this pacing is frequently not conducive to interactions that lead to the best assessments.

## 3  Offer comfortable travel

Attempt to minimize candidate travel discomfort by helping book business class flights and reputable hotel accommodations. Even small steps such as timely expense reimbursement enhance the experience. The attitude to adopt can best be summarized in the recruiting version of the golden rule: "Treat candidates as you would like to be treated."

## 4  Attend to the candidate visit itinerary

This step offers substantial personalization opportunities. Encourage candidates to participate in crafting an onsite visit itinerary that reflects their interests and concerns. Often overlooked, spouse and family itineraries can also be developed to display further personalization and attention to the overall experience.

## 5  Communicate effectively

A recent survey revealed that C-suite candidates most prize three factors while being recruited, displayed in Figure 1.[8]

All three rely heavily on good communication. First, effective communications are end-to-end, starting with upfront candidate guidance through to final determination. Second, timely feedback is important. Keep candidates apprised of the process and their status. Finally, use multi-channel delivery personalized when possible to the candidate's preferred modes.

From an overall communications management perspective, several best practices optimize the experience:

- Make sure all participants in the hiring process are communicating among themselves in timely fashion (Figure 2). That minimizes delays and other factors deleterious to candidate experience.

- Maintain a consistent message and tone that reinforces the employer brand.

FIGURE 1

### WHAT DO C-SUITE CANDIDATES WANT IN RECRUITING?

**73%** Interview coaching

**67%** Immediate feedback after an interview

**69%** Communicate on my channels

8. PwC, *Future of Recruiting Survey*, 2019.

- Adopt a marketing orientation and use varied communication channels and materials.
- Where relevant, ensure that messages related to diversity hiring are genuine and appropriate.

### 6 Introduce candidates to the hiring authority early in the process

Many candidates have reacted positively or negatively based on timing of exposure to the hiring executive. Putting the two together early in the process often engenders favorable candidate feelings toward the organization and the opportunity. AMN recommends introductions in most cases no later than the second visit.

FIGURE 2



### 7 Demonstrate inclusivity

When recruiting diverse candidates, demonstrate the organization's culture of inclusivity by having a diverse selection committee and exposing candidates to diverse staff members during site visits.

### 8 Be mindful of rejected candidates

A positive experience among those not offered positions solidifies the brand and helps maintain a pipeline for future hires. Explaining the rationale for the choice can be a prime asset in this regard.
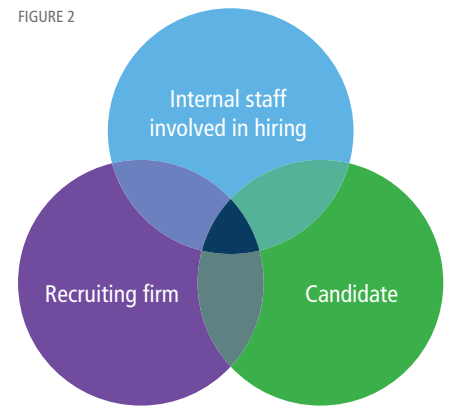
# Role of Technology

Execution of these strategies is greatly assisted by technology. Candidates today expect to be engaged digitally. The key is to offer convenience and personal connection. Leading technologies that foster good candidate experience include (Figure 3):

FIGURE 3



### Video interviewing

Video became a major tool during the COVID-19 restrictions and is now often the default first round interview method. Avoiding travel and the resultant loss of executive or clinical productivity makes video's flexibility attractive to candidates. Equally valuable is the confidentiality enabled by the process. Leadership candidates are often asked to address a specific topic on video interviews. A preparatory call with a search manager to explain the interview parameters and provide tips on optimizing onscreen appearance is a candidate-friendly step. Allowing candidates sufficient time to prepare their presentations further strengthens the experience.

### Mobile and other electronic communications

Text messaging can be an appropriate way to maintain contact and create a more personal touch than email. Mobile apps, chat, dedicated website landing pages, and other electronic vehicles not only offer additional contact points, they also heighten candidate convenience in filling out forms, scheduling calls, and more.
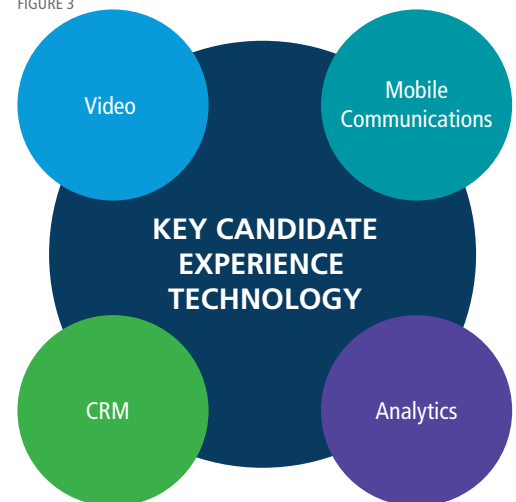
## Customer relationship management (CRM) or HR account management software

Some health systems and hospitals have committed to using the robust features of today's CRM systems to help track candidate progress efficiently and consistently. CRM is effective at actively managing both current candidates and future prospects. The latter can be engaged through CRM-managed communications and programs such as online talent communities that maintain a motivated pipeline.

## Analytics

Talent acquisition is increasingly benefiting from data gathering and analysis at scale. Artificial intelligence and other technologies are generating new insights that aid in profiling and understanding candidates, reaping process improvements, and providing recruiting decision support.

# Multiple Benefits

Positive candidate experiences foster meaningful and durable outcomes:

**Recruitment.**
Improves ability to attract desirable leaders.

**Retention.**
Engagement at the candidate stage promotes post-hire retention.

**Reputation.**
Reinforces the organization's brand as a great place to work.

**Efficiency.**
Time and cost savings often accrue to strong candidate experience management due to improved coordination and communication. The approaches identified in this report are also highly consistent with lean recruiting methodologies.

**Leadership development.**
Candidate experiences that underscore collaboration contribute to building ideal leadership teams for today's demands.

# Conclusion

Experience has moved to the forefront of healthcare. Leadership recruiting should participate in this trend, and the recommendations in this report offer proven steps not only to enhance candidate experiences but also to elevate the organization's brand.

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