

Pitfalls to avoid and Top Tips for successful leadership recruitment

Running a successful campaign to recruit a Headteacher or Principal during your 'spare time' is a massive undertaking that requires commitment, collaboration, coordination, cooperation, confidentiality, expertise..... and more time than you can possibly imagine at the outset. However, get it right and it will be tremendously rewarding as you watch your school or academy flourish under new, invigorating leadership.

This is a brief list of key aspects to consider during both the planning and execution of the process.

When Planning.....

- Plan carefully and work back from 'resignation' dates to ensure you advertise at an appropriate time. The majority of schools advertise during January and February each year for a September start, but it is equally possible to recruit successfully at other times of the year. Allowing at least 3 months for the project is sensible.
- Formally appoint an odd number of Governors/Trustees to your selection panel early in the process, ensuring that they are available for all stages of the process e.g. for shortlisting meetings and on (all) selection days. Delegate responsibilities among this team.
- Notify all Governors/Trustees of the time and date of the ratification meeting in good time.
- Be realistic about costs, you are investing considerable time and energy in securing the future leadership of the school, if you need additional expertise please remember this is an investment and buy it in. Getting it wrong or going again can be a very expensive option.
- Design the process for your school; avoid a generic, off-the-shelf package as this will not give you adequate, appropriate information to make your informed selection decisions.

When Selecting.....

There are some common pitfalls to be avoided when actually assessing applicants. Knowing about these possibilities makes it easier to avoid them:

- First Impressions: ensure that you are not influenced by an initial favourable impression and disregard later evidence to the contrary
- "Central Tendency" the inclination to assign a score which avoids either high or low marks
- "Halo effect" and conversely "Cloven Hoof effect" the inclination to generalise one aspect of good or poor performance respectively to a candidate's overall performance
- Harshness or leniency – viewing an individual favourably or unfavourably, potentially an issue if you are having to judge internal v. external candidates
- Stereotyping – allowing a personal bias from previous observations to distort your evaluations of the candidate group
- Last Impressions / Recency – where you are most influenced by a final strong impression and disregard earlier evidence indicating poorer performance.

Finally, keep comprehensive records of observations, outcomes and decisions, securing these safely for a period of 6 months following the recruitment process, after which they should be shredded.

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