

Ask Valerie Goes Social

Being the hip, innovative, tech-savvy Silicon Valley CEO I sometimes—mostly—usually try to be, we at VF&Co have recently started using Quora, the social-media answer to Yahoo Answers that's been picking up a lot of buzz over the last year. And somewhere along the line, while responding to a bunch of HR-related queries on the site, I realized that I was having a lot more fun with these questions and answers than I was having with the newsletter I'd originally planned for this month. The questions range from the really good to the utterly ridiculous, but they show that everyone from CEOs and board members to hiring managers and job seekers are facing a lot of uncertainty in these strangest of economic times.

Over the next few months you'll see more of us on Quora (as well as our new blog, and hopefully also that newsletter I had intended to write, about why HR executives tend to not interview well). But for now, here's the best of the Qs and As we've tackled so far.

What is the right number of people to place on a hiring committee?

I love this question because almost no one asks it and there is scientific evidence to back up the answer. Studies performed by the Center for Creative Leadership show that having more than four people interview an executive-level candidate doesn't add extra value. But—and it's a big but—you have to select those four well and make sure they're up to the task. My advice: Pick the hiring manager, a peer, an internal customer, and someone representing "the company" (either HR or a key exec). The hiring manager should listen to everyone's opinions and then make a strong, firm decision.

However, this may not be the best approach when you have what I like to call "change management issues." This is when whomever you hire is going to be set up for failure unless a whole bunch of people (usually the internal customers of this person's work) get on board with a new vision or plan. In this case, I suggest interviewing all of the potential troublemakers in advance to get their opinions on how smoothly the function this new person will be overseeing is currently running. For example, when we're asked to bring in a Talent Acquisition/Staffing Director, and the hiring managers are all used to using their own pet recruiters and negotiating their own deals, my firm first conducts a "Staffing Survey," asking all the managers how well staffing has been performing at their company. They usually end up admitting that they're part of the problem and candidly discuss how much needs to change. Once they've done that, and are then brought in to interview the top candidates, they tend to be much more on board with the individual who ends up being hired and the changes that will naturally follow.

Is it a good idea to have someone at the job candidate's level (instead of the hiring manager) interview a candidate over the phone?

Yes, as long as this helpful person has honorable motives.

If the CEO of a company is having a consensual physical relationship with an employee, what are the best practices the Board can take to protect the company from liability if the relationship ends badly?

I've never seen it end well, and I've frequently seen it cascade and harm many people's careers. So the best you can do is to try to put some walls around it, eliminating opportunities for financial impropriety and chances for the CEO or his paramour to blame and/or punish employees who try to intervene when problems inevitably occur.

Example: Have the CFO, as the Board's representative, personally approve the CEO's expense reports, including all travel and entertainment spending. The CFO could approve expenses that are clearly legitimate while recommending to the Board that they delve further into anything that looks iffy. Also, don't put managers or HR staffers in the uncomfortable position of having to approve expenses or promotions for the significant other. Have the Board appoint a representative to handle it directly. And watch out for the CEO hiring his romantic partner to do 1099 work, since you can also get hit with charges of misclassification and IRS fraud. Basically, draw one bubble around the CEO and another around the girlfriend, and don't let them abuse their discretionary powers. Finally, look into having both parties sign waivers (while represented by their own attorneys) stating that they entered into the relationship willingly, are not being harassed, and will forfeit their rights to sue the company as the result of any future problems stemming from the tryst.

I am 10 weeks pregnant and interviewing for a new job. When should I tell my future employer?

As a mom of twin toddlers and an HR industry leader who's constantly preaching the need for work-life balance, I definitely have some opinions on this one. My general advice is that it's situational and depends on a number of factors. How big is the prospective employer? Do they have other people who can fill in for you? How long are you anticipating taking off? A week? Three months? A year? (I only took 30 days off, but came back part-time and no longer work in the office more than about 30 hours a week). What kind of support system do you have? Why are you interviewing for a new job? And frankly, what kind of a relationship do you want to have with your boss long-term? On the one hand, I'm a firm believer in the importance of family, and don't think impending motherhood should stifle anyone's career. On the other, if someone joined my small firm and didn't tell me that they were expecting, I'd have a hard time liking them in seven months when they leave us in an unexpected lurch.

What have you found to be the best activities/methods to take a small group through strategy changes?

For me, nothing beats a group-facilitated SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis. Involve everyone. Talk them through everything one step at a time. Give everyone a chance to participate in the planning. And let everyone process things at their own pace.

What are good ways to find and hire someone who is brilliant at finding and hiring the right brilliant people for the right job?

Perhaps at brylcreem.com? But seriously, how about settling for smart and competent staffing people who can set up smart and competent processes to find and hire smart and competent candidates? The problem is that brilliance is, by definition, in the eyes of the beholder. A Director of Talent Acquisition can have "brilliantly" recruited 1,100 employees for one of the best known and respected tech companies in the world, but may not interview with precision and come across as only so-so. Or he can

be leading staffing at this super-respected company, but if the management makes a bad decision and the shine comes off, so does his “brilliant” reputation. And therein lies the other problem with brilliance: Shiny statues can be easily knocked off of their pedestals.

What is the best question to ask in an interview in order to determine if a job candidate has good attitude?

“Wanna get started right now?”

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HR Professional Development Events

2011 HR Technology Conference

October 3–5, 2011 — Mandalay Bay, Las Vegas, NV

SHRM 2011 Strategy Conference

October 5–7, 2011 — Fairmont, Chicago, IL

NCHRA HR In the Life Sciences Summit

October 6, 2011 — Bingham McCutchen LLP, San Francisco, CA

2011 HR People & Strategy Fall Forum

October 23–25, 2011 — The West Arlington Gateway, Washington D.C.

The 2011 HR SouthWest Conference

October 30–November 2, 2011 — Fort Worth, TX

NCHRA HR Leadership & Strategy Conference

November 3, 2011 — Marriott, San Francisco, CA

HR Consultant & Contractors' Corner

Needed an HR contractor yesterday? You will be guaranteed one qualified candidate within 24 hours, or two within 48 hours. This includes Compensation & Benefits, M&A, HRIS, OD, Generalist, and all other areas of expertise. All our contractors are personally supervised by Partner & Principal HR Consultant James Holland and have access to our entire consulting staff and its resources. Immediate needs? Contact James Holland at 650.614.0220 or james@vfandco.com.

Current Executive Searches

HR Executive Searches

Vice President of Human Resources Executive Search (Austin, TX)

High growth, public software company needs an expert in organizational design, change management, and leadership development, who can partner with and support the executive team. The ideal VPHR candidate applies a proactive approach to developing and implementing HR solutions and has a background working in dynamic and rapidly changing organizations. Experience preparing reports for and presenting to the Board of Directors required.

Vice President of Human Resources Executive Search (Los Angeles, CA)

Pre-IPO, 500-employee tech company in exponential growth mode needs a strategic, results-driven, HR executive to build the HR function from the ground up and partner with the executive team on the people strategy. The ideal candidate is confident, knowledgeable, metrics-driven, direct, proactive, and collaborative.

Vice President of Human Resources Executive Search (Sunnyvale, CA)

Rapidly growing, pre-IPO, enterprise software start-up needs a strategic, business-minded HR leader who can roll up their sleeves and build a best-in-class HR function. This role requires an expert in organizational effectiveness, talent management and employee engagement and will partner with the executive team to develop and implement scalable HR programs.

Senior Director of Talent Acquisition Executive Search (Los Angeles, CA)

Pre-IPO, entertainment company, with 500 employees and growing fast, needs a Director of Talent Acquisition to handle exponential growth and embrace and promote the culture throughout all talent acquisition activities. This role will use creative recruiting methods to find and successfully compete for extremely bright, results-driven employees. The ideal candidate has previous experience building an aggressive and creative recruitment function in a start-up environment.

Director of Human Resources Executive Search (San Jose, CA)

Global, large biotech company requires a business-minded, hands-on, up-and-coming human resources executive to lead HR for their fastest growing division. This Director will partner with the business leaders on internal strategic consulting across a wide variety of functions. The ideal candidate is an expert in international HR, OD and M&A.

Director of Human Resources Executive Search (Sunnyvale, CA)

Large, global biotech company needs an HR executive with in depth experience in process improvement, change management and international HR. The ideal candidate has extensive experience with large best-in-class biotech or pharmaceutical organizations.

Senior Manager of Compensation Executive Search (Fremont, CA)

Reputable, public, tech company with world-renowned consumer tech products needs a Senior Compensation Manager to support the sales, marketing and product development groups. The role reports to the Director of Global Compensation Programs, a delightful, smart, professional comp expert we've known for years. Our client is looking for flexible, articulate, hands-on compensation experts with global experience. The person in this role will closely partner with the business leaders on designing and implementing sales and non-sales incentive compensation plans.

Manager of Human Resources Executive Search (San Jose, CA)

Large biotech company with offices worldwide, needs a strong business partner to join their rapidly changing organization. This person will be Six Sigma certified with a well-rounded HR generalist background and has had exposure to M&A, talent management, and global HR in a rapidly changing environment.

Executive Compensation Consultant Executive Search (San Jose, CA)

International, public tech company seeks an internal Executive Compensation Consultant to design, roll-out, and manage global executive compensation programs and create materials for the Board of Directors' Compensation Committee. This role will provide support to the HR Business Partners in negotiating executive offers and any related executive compensation issues. The ideal candidate has a background with public tech companies and is an executive compensation expert. Must have business acumen, assertiveness, and excellent communication skills.

Manager of Human Resources Executive Search (Yountville, CA)

Sparkling, 250 employee, boutique destination winery and restaurant in Napa Valley needs an HR Manager. This role will directly oversee compensation, benefits, recruiting, training and more. Major international career opportunities within the Paris-based parent organization. The ideal candidate is flexible and collaborative, with strong analytical skills. In-depth experience in compensation required.

Human Resources Business Partner Executive Search (Sunnyvale, CA)

High growth, innovative SaaS company with low key, innovative, collaborative, appealing culture seeks a business minded HR Business Partner to support their global sales group. This person is an expert in compensation, learning and development, and talent management. Experience supporting sales and first time VPs in high growth environments is a must.

Internal VF&Co Searches

Yes, along with the rest of the world, we are hiring and have been all year. We're currently looking for a marketing associate: someone with really strong writing and thinking skills, preferably a degree in Liberal Arts, who is good at foreign languages, loves to travel, and wants to get involved in a consulting firm. Should be outgoing, positive, collaborative, able to follow directions, multi-task, and self-manage. Anyone have any off-spring with 0-5 years of experience? Email your resumé in MS Word format to michele@vfandco.com.

Submit Your Profile

Due to the high volume of candidate submissions and the relatively quick pace with which we're filling our current searches, we recommend that all qualified candidates, whether you are a Board Director, CEO, CFO, or HR Executive, make sure that we have your updated information in our database and are aware of what you're looking for. That way, if we get something, be it RFT or contract, we can slip you in right away! For the most up-to-date information on our searches, you can follow us on Twitter, network with us on LinkedIn, and Like us on Facebook.