

3 WAYS CULTURE SHOULD INFORM Your Next Executive Hire

IRONSIDE
& ASSOCIATES



More than 80% of recruiters recently surveyed agree that cultural fit is one of the most important factors in making a successful executive hire.

Human resources (HR) consultant Julie Jacobs helps clients identify, select, and coach the executive leaders that thrive within their organizations. As the founder and principal consultant at Ironside & Associates, a firm offering strategic organizational development for C-suite executives and founders, Jacobs focuses on working with small and mid-sized privately held companies, where values-based hiring is possible, and the power of culture is embraced.

In her work, Jacobs often finds that a high emotional quotient (E.Q.) can trump I.Q. when making an executive leadership hire. E.Q. is defined as the ability to perceive, understand and manage one's own feelings and emotions, and at a glance, it is easy to understand how E.Q. applies in the workplace, particularly in leadership roles.

"People don't leave their jobs, they leave their managers," Jacobs says. "It is imperative that the leaders in an organization understand that. At Ironside, we participate regularly in executive leadership meetings to help executives consider how they should be thinking about and managing their teams in terms of emotional intelligence or E.Q. Especially in privately held companies, some decisions are not driven solely by profitability, but are about supporting the sustainability of the business. This investment in culture is manifested by the leadership and stakeholders, so we take that knowledge to our search. When we focus on cultural fit, we are recognizing that if an individual is happy at work, if they feel they're being treated with respect, they're not going anywhere, and data tells us the organization will achieve greater results."

Jacobs' experience suggests that developing E.Q. skills among leaders and hiring new C-suite executives with that strength as well, reinforces and builds culture. And, alignment around a strong culture supports the success and sustainability of the company. When counseling Ironside's clients, she provides tools to help them develop three aspects of a strong culture within their companies and works with them to hire new executives with that strength as well. With this white paper, we'll explore the three tools:

1. Entity Alignment
2. Prioritize High E.Q., Values Match
3. Onboard...and Integrate



5 COMPONENTS OF EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE:

- 1. Self-awareness**
- 2. Self-regulation**
- 3. Internal (or intrinsic) motivation**
- 4. Empathy**
- 5. Social skills**

ENTITY ALIGNMENT

One of the most important habits Jacobs works to develop within leadership teams is the ability to put aside personal biases and motivations in favor of what's best for the entity, the company as a whole. She helps this mindset take hold by becoming a part of client executive teams, participating in their leadership meetings, facilitating discussions, and pointing out viewpoints that may be missing from the conversation.

This level of engagement allows her to be deeply in tune with the company, its executive leaders, goals, and plans. By integrating with the team, Jacobs is able to find the optimal fit when seeking a new executive to add to the team. She is informed by relationships, she sees possible skill gaps, she sees how the organization is driving the strategic plan, as opposed to working with just the job description when going to market.

"Being in tune with both the needs of the entity and the executive team are essential in successfully finding the next leader," Jacobs says. "If I'm going to ask someone to relocate across the country for a new job, I want to ensure that this person has a fighting chance of wild success. For that to be true, we need to find a match between the company's values and the candidate's own values, and a fit across the personalities and work styles on the executive team."

James Damron, vice president of human resources at V&V Supremo Foods, has first-hand experience with the effectiveness of the Ironside & Associates approach. Jacobs led the search that placed him in his position and continues to consult with V&V as an active part of their management team.

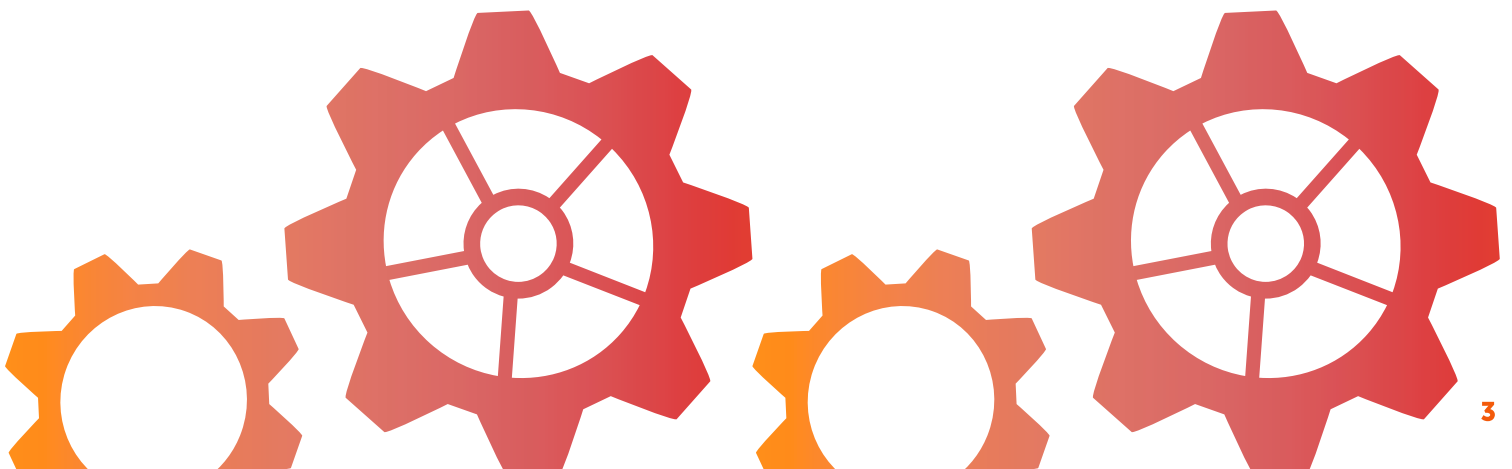
"Julie successfully embeds within the culture of the company so she knows exactly what will fit the entity best," Damron says. "When she talks about different

executives – it could be the VP of Sales, or the CFO for example – she'll talk about whether that particular executive is process driven or results driven and what that means in terms of the candidates. In addition, she points out disconnects: if, for example, we talk about our culture and what drives our employees' success, but then we talk differently about management traits we want in our executives, she doesn't hesitate to peel back the layers, asking the tough questions to ensure she gets the fit that is truly aligned."

Each entity is different in myriad ways, and that's why Jacobs insists on direct involvement with the executive teams she represents. She shares differences between two of her clients as an example: One client really cares about office aesthetics, while the other client doesn't prioritize that in the same way. The second client focuses on the quality of their product, and reinvestment back into the community. In contrast, the first client just moved to a new location and outfitted the space with built in high-end fixtures, sit-stand desks, and oversized computer monitors for all. Their philosophy is that people love working in a beautiful space and that if you feel good, you will do better work.

"That's an example of a family-owned company that believes if you treat people well, they won't go anywhere," Jacobs says. "The difference is how my clients define treating employees well. While most companies want their employees to stay long term, they manifest it differently. There is no right or wrong approach. The key is understanding who you are as a company and recruiting someone who will thrive and support your company's unique ethos."

Because Ironside & Associates understands those differences, they're able to match candidates for an effective cultural fit, and counsel the entity strategically.



PRIORITIZE HIGH E.Q., VALUES MATCH

When an executive's skills go beyond the specifics of getting the job done and include empathy, intrinsic motivation, and social skills, not only will the high E.Q. employee thrive, but their direct reports will benefit as will the entity as a whole.

"When a company has a leader who is thriving in their role, how do we keep them engaged?" asks Jacobs. "In many instances, the answer is empowering them to do more. We help clients keep top talent and groom them. We make sure they're taking care of those high E.Q. leaders so we don't lose them, they are very often the best champions for company culture."

What does that look like in practice? It starts at the top and often, it starts by observing behaviors and habits – then modeling what you want to encourage across the enterprise.

For one executive team, Jacobs recognized that multitasking during meetings (i.e. answering texts and emails via cellphones), meant that the team wasn't fully connected. For the high E.Q. people in the group, that was creating stress and shining a light on a missed opportunity for progress. For others on the team, it was modeling the wrong behavior.

"If you bring that behavior to your own department meetings, how does that make them feel? Do your employees feel like they have your time and attention? Try a meeting without your phone – your team will feel more empowered to share something with you because you're fully present. Cultivating skill sets for empathy and tolerance takes focus and often begins with modeling the right behavior as well as developing and listening."

A similar level of focus is needed when recruiting new executives. V&V's Damron says Jacobs' approach minimized uncertain feelings he had as a candidate via open communication, candid discussion, and responsiveness.

"As a candidate at the executive level, it can be challenging to understand where you are in the process, what the next steps are, what the expectations are," he says. "Typically, with that level of a role, you'll have your interview, follow up, and then you sit and wait and wonder what's going on. I think what gives Julie the advantage is the fact that she's candid."

How does "extra mile" teamwork like that happen? As an OD consultant, Jacobs facilitates to align the team around the strategic objective and gain their commitment and buy-in to the process. In sum: it's about people and process.



"No matter what business you're in, you're in the business of building people."

– JULIE JACOBS



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“Leadership teams are typically stretched for resources and have more on their plate than they can likely accomplish – adding more is not a welcomed idea. Aligning the team is critical, and in this instance, accepting that the ERP implementation supported the goals of the business was essential. The next step was building a list of deliverables to ensure accountability. This approach underscores the idea that as a member of the executive team, you’re representing the organization at large – and you can do that while maintaining your expertise within your department.”

Damron says Jacobs talks directly and openly with each person who will have input on the decision to hire before counseling a candidate. She makes sure to understand what needs they have for the new role – not just job duties and official functions, but personality traits that influence the organizational and cultural fit.

“And then when she talks to a candidate, she’s not solely focused on a resume. She asks how it translates, and what skill sets you bring,” says Damron. “She wants to understand how candidates work with different personality types. Julie understands nuances and unique cultures,

and she looks at the big picture to ensure long-term success for everyone involved.”

At Ironside & Associates, Jacobs and her team understand the dynamics of privately held businesses and vet candidates based on personal and cultural factors, ensuring the ultimate hire complements the established leadership team. From creating customized assessment criteria to structuring compensation metrics and overseeing onboarding, Jacobs works diligently to ensure a positive transition.



7 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO HELP DETERMINE E.Q.

A recent article in Inc. Magazine reports on a survey conducted with more than 600 HR managers and 800 office workers as proof that emotional intelligence is critically important. The article offers interview questions to help understand a candidate's E.Q. capacity. They are adapted here for executive hires:

- 1.** In your past work as a team leader, how did you get to know each person's preferences and juggle conflicting priorities?
- 2.** Tell me about a workplace conflict you were involved in: How did you manage that conflict, and were you able to resolve it?
- 3.** Describe the most challenging work relationship you've ever had. What was the most difficult thing about that relationship, and how did you manage it?
- 4.** What would a previous boss say that you need to work on most? Have you taken steps to improve in this area, and if so, what have you tried to change?
- 5.** Tell me about a day when everything went wrong. How did you handle it?
- 6.** What type of work environment brings out your best performance? Your worst?
- 7.** If business priorities change, describe how you would help your team understand and carry out the shifted goals.



ONBOARD... AND INTEGRATE

With the right executives placed in key roles, the final challenge is to instill the mindset and processes that help them live the culture themselves and model it for the rest of the company.

"When I work with an executive team, because of my HR background, I evaluate staff utilization, compensation, performance management, but I'm also looking at how best to identify and train the high performing individuals that we want in our culture."

Diligence is important because, despite careful recruiting efforts, you can never know the impact a new executive will have on a company and its leadership team until they start to contribute. Jacobs advocates for ongoing mentorship and executive coaching, helping leaders find their unique leadership style that best fits the company's vision and culture.

Supporting leaders' transitions – whether they're new hires or evolving into new roles – requires much more than bringing the executive safely on deck, which is why Harvard Business Review suggests integration is a more apt term than "onboarding" to describe the work needed.

Among important integration efforts, Ironside & Associates helps client executives:

- Develop personal and career goals to achieve optimal results for the company
- Improve strategic vision to help move the needle for the company
- Provide guidance and leadership training grounded in knowledge of your business and people
- Align business strategy with strong leadership & career objectives

"As a new hire, there are always surprises and some confusion once you settle in," Damron says. If a situation surfaces, Julie and her team are there through the transition period and follow up with the executive team as needed. "Julie learns and adapts so she can coach future hires on what's likely to happen, and what they can do to ameliorate an issue. The service that Julie provides is iterative. Even if it takes a year or five years to use her again for a search – she retains that knowledge and experience to make your next hire even better," adds Damron.

For more information on strategic organizational development for C-suite executives and founders, contact Julie Jacobs at Ironside & Associates.

*(Chignell, 2018) <https://positivepsychology.com/emotional-intelligence-workplace/>

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WHY NEW LEADERS STUMBLE

Harvard Business Review reports the following statistics on the reasons senior executives fail following the transition to a new role, from a global survey:

69% Poor grasp of how the organization works

65% Misfit with organizational culture

57% Difficulty forging alliances with peers

48% Lack of understanding the business model

31% Ineffective decision making

28% Disagreement over strategy

26% Lack of experience or skill