

FAQs

Why should we work with you? When will we see candidates? What makes a search successful? And other questions we're frequently asked.

Hi, Jim Wills here. Since my name's at the top of the page, I thought that I'd directly answer some of our most frequently asked questions, starting with:

WHY ENGAGE WILLS CONSULTING ASSOCIATES?

I personally handle every search that WCA undertakes—with engagement-specific research and administrative support. And I bring to each engagement the perspective of more than 25 years' success in the communications search arena, a pre-search business career in corporate communications and agency public relations, and formal training as a management consultant.

SO WHAT?

Good question.

I believe corporate communications and public relations search clients (as well as the engagement itself) can benefit from the perspective of an individual who, in addition to a strong track record in communications search, has worked in their profession, possesses an "in the trenches" understanding of what they do, appreciates the business environment in which they operate, and—based on his body of experience—has developed a bias for linking communications strategy with organizational success.

To briefly elaborate on the "communications" piece, my experience in this arena included the management of annual reports, executive speechwriting, marketing communications, special events, media relations, and planning and implementation of communications programs that tangibly "moved the needle." Employers/clients included McKesson, The Golden Gate Bridge, Burson-Marsteller, Booz Allen & Hamilton, the Federal Reserve Bank of Mexico, and Merrill Lynch. This was a time of public relations/communications "generalists" and I found that I particularly enjoyed helping clients solve business challenges with communications solutions, learning about new

industries and businesses, and constantly developing new skills. This forms the foundation of my search work.

Finally, candidates know that the individual who brings them into the recruiting process has a first-hand understanding of their background, skills, and experience. And most important, how these might be leveraged into their next career opportunity.

MIGHT YOU ELABORATE ON THE MANAGEMENT CONSULTING PIECE?

I received training as a management consultant at Booz Allen Hamilton in preparation for assuming a marketing and communications management role in the firm's Technology Management Group. The Managing Partner of the group believed I could best represent it in the marketplace if I understood, first hand, the firm's consulting "product." So I went through the same rigorous 'boot camp' as every newly-hired consultant.

My class included new MBAs from such institutions as Harvard, Columbia, University of Chicago, and Stanford (as well as seasoned business professionals and one MD). I was immersed (20/7) in an intensive program: *Theory and Practice of Management Consulting*. This was a formalized process-based approach to business problem-solving that the firm had developed, and fine-tuned over time, to analyze and solve a variety of business challenges faced by clients globally (Think Six Sigma.). I subsequently leveraged this process in my PR work and found that it is even more applicable in the search field. It was a career-building experience that I'm happy to discuss in greater depth with anyone interested.

WHEN WILL WE SEE CANDIDATES?

Our model is to present a slate of "benchmark" candidates to clients within twenty to thirty business days after beginning an assignment. While we may present additional candidates subsequent to the benchmark presentation, one of the benchmarks has usually received and accepted the offer. We always discuss timing issues before the search begins and this timeframe can be compressed to address particularly urgent situations.

HOW LONG DOES A SEARCH TAKE---START TO FINISH?

Our target is 100 business days. But, obviously, such unpredictable issues as travel schedules, conflicting calendars, and holidays might affect the process after we present candidates.

YOU HAVEN'T WORKED IN OUR INDUSTRY (OR RECRUITED IN THE FUNCTIONAL AREA WE ARE DISCUSSING). IS THIS A POTENTIAL PROBLEM?

Nope.

The WCA search process is based on a constantly evolving consulting model that has been used successfully in a broad variety of industries and functions. On occasion, in fact, we've consulted with clients to help them develop Position Descriptions "from scratch" for new business they were in the process of creating---and then went on to successfully recruit for those positions.

WHAT IF THE CANDIDATE TURNS OUT TO BE A GOOD FIT?

First, we should point out that this has happened only once in 25+ years.

But in the rare event that it should happen again, we will attempt to replace, on an expenses-only basis, any candidate who leaves a client's employ within a year of the start date. This guarantee will not apply if the departure is caused by such unexpected events as mergers, acquisitions, downsizing, or changes in management.

WHAT MAKES A SEARCH SUCCESSFUL?

An obvious answer would be, "A great client and outstanding candidates...and closure."

But here are some other considerations:

- The "buy-in" by all partners at the beginning of an engagement that we're involved in a collaborative effort requiring close coordination between the client and the search firm
- Mutual understanding of expectations
- Thorough search firm understanding of the client culture, its businesses, competitive issues, potential communications strategy/business strategy linkages, the role the candidate will be expected to assume in the organization, and the criteria against which her or his success will be measured—in the first six months, the first year, eighteen months, and the longer- term.
- A timetable for "deliverables"
- Clear and honest communications throughout the search process -- formal (regular reports) and informal (as needed). The operative phrase is "no surprises."

And of course, a great client and outstanding candidates.