

Bridging Social Distance to Recruit Key Hires



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The biopharmaceutical industry faces many challenges due to the current global health crisis. Quarantines and social distancing measures have impacted operations in ways never imagined. Senior executives and leaders are navigating through contingency plans, employee safety measures and remote work set-ups, as well as how to make key recruitments without face-to-face interviews.

This is all far from what we previously considered ideal. Yet, the current environment brings an important question to the forefront of strategy discussions: Can and should companies continue to move forward and make critical hiring decisions based on virtual interviews?

For competitive players who cannot afford to sit on the sidelines, the answer is a resounding “yes”. As we all acknowledge and accept the additional hurdles that have altered our landscape, we must adapt, change and forge ahead. Social distancing will continue for the foreseeable future, and the new ideas and techniques that evolve from this pandemic will undoubtedly re-shape recruitment practices moving forward. At Catalyst Advisors, we are utilizing the following “best in class” practices to ensure our clients make hiring decisions with confidence during this pivotal time, further strengthening their market positions for the future.

REIMAGINING THE TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW PROCESS

While phone and video interviews have always been part of the recruitment process, final decisions on candidates have traditionally relied on the impressions made during in-person meetings.

The benefits of face-to-face meetings cannot be denied, both in work and personal settings. We all assess people based on a variety of subconscious signals, verbal and nonverbal cues. Science confirms that first impressions happen quickly and are difficult to change. According to research published in the journal *Psychological Science*, our brain forms an impression of people in a tenth of a second based on exposure to facial appearance alone.

When we interact through the lens of a camera, the lack of physical proximity can make it feel harder to connect if we rely on the cues we previously looked for in person. This may cause frustration and unfairly create a negative first impression, resulting in less effective communication thereafter. Instead, as we positively embrace video conferencing technologies, we are developing new signals, skills and ways to engage, enabling us to fully leverage this powerful tool.

In addition, with so many of us working from home, there are technical barriers, familial and personal distractions all around. Network bandwidth is being challenged. Children and pets are running around. These issues can unintentionally detract from an interview. Flexibility, advance planning, and a sense of humor are the best ways to mitigate or move on from such problems. Resources like video presence training, professional IT assessments and technical support are worthwhile investments.

Communicating via video may strike us as less rich physically and emotionally than in-person meetings, yet as the demand and need continue, video conferencing experiences will improve along with our attitudes about it.

ADAPTING TO A NEW NORM: TURNING CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES

Current circumstances may not change anytime soon, and the impact of this pandemic will have lasting effects beyond the virus. Adapting and creating innovative solutions now will not only have obvious short-term benefits but will also create new standards for the future.

Understandably, hiring exclusively through a virtual process may feel uncomfortable. For leaders to feel confident in their assessment of candidates, enriching the overall experience of phone and video interviewing is imperative. Hand-in-hand with our clients, we have developed various initiatives to precisely address this, and based on our recent experiences, the most successful hiring processes have shared a combination or all of the characteristics below:

- **Visual cues:** those who are more animated, expressive and energetic on video are perceived to be more engaged and interested. Whether one-on-one or presenting to a group, distinct physical cues and signs help keep attention focused. Clear facial signals (such as a big smile or a questioning raised eyebrow) help reinforce the intended context and meaning of the points being discussed.
- **Increased communication with the candidate throughout the hiring process:** ask more questions and be more responsive than usual. Keep candidates informed and engaged. Proactively share details about your company and culture. Our most innovative clients anticipate what conversations are needed to actively recruit and engage hesitant candidates. These additional discussions greatly help executive leaders visualize themselves in a new role, even though it was all communicated virtually.
- **Virtual team meeting:** after the initial one-on-one interviews, have the candidate participate in a virtual meeting with the team to give insights into team dynamics and interactions among colleagues.
- **Online tour:** offer an online tour, as many colleges are now doing, to give prospects a sense of what their new surroundings will look, sound and feel.
- **Case study:** consider case study interviews to further assess how a candidate may handle a given scenario.
- **Video trailers:** consider adding video trailers for new roles as a more personalized, yet highly efficient, way to introduce the organization and the future team to candidates for various roles. It can be compelling to hear and see a leader describe the company's mission, and how this role will impact an organization. (It could be useful for marketing or internal communications purposes as well!)

- 360 references: referencing is more critical than ever. Along with the number of references required, the quality of references must also increase. Experienced, skilled interviewers elicit true insights about, and evidence of, the leadership competencies required for success. Begin informal referencing early in the process and ensure that full 360-degree references are completed before an offer is made.

These actions are imperative as we all learn to maximize the value of our virtual interactions. By embracing this shift, companies are able to assess leaders more thoroughly, while also providing candidates with a better understanding of a company's people, mission and culture.

As expert recruiters, our role expands. We have been using virtual techniques for many years to source and assess the best candidates, so we are already comfortable and adept at gaining the most from our virtual interactions. In today's climate, our clients rely even more heavily on our in-depth experience and expertise to advise them on developing new hiring processes, as well as how to evaluate motivations, behaviors and measurable capabilities to ensure objective guidance on distance hires.

STAY COMPETITIVE AND GIVE YOUR COMPANY AN EDGE

Some companies will want to wait for restrictions to end before making a final decision. But in crisis times, leaders need to weigh the distinct possibility of losing a desirable candidate in this highly competitive biopharma talent market. Innovation in the therapeutics industry is accelerating and the demand for new leaders only continues to increase. In "normal" times, companies typically had one chance to recruit a particular individual for a key executive position. Today, decisive action is paramount.

The ripple effect of COVID-19 will forever change the way we conduct business. Virtual hiring methods are here to stay, in one form or another, and knowing how to effectively connect, communicate and execute sound decisions remotely is essential. With some enhancements to the virtual hiring process, and help from experienced advisors, leaders do not, and should not, have to wait for the return of "normalcy" to confidently fill critical roles. Techniques learned and implemented during this time will serve you and your organization well in the future.

CATALYST ADVISORS

ABOUT CATALYST ADVISORS

Bringing visionary leaders to transformative life sciences companies

Catalyst Advisors is a global leader in executive recruitment for the life sciences community. We are for discerning companies looking for a trusted partner to help them build transformational boardrooms and executive leadership teams.

Respected, engaged and lauded for our unparalleled service, we choose to work with therapeutics companies who value our industry expertise and skill in identifying and recruiting visionary executives who truly drive impact.

Our collaborative approach gives us the agility to address shifting talent trends and tailor solutions for each distinct business. With our eyes toward the future, we leverage decades of experience, rich networks and rigorous, finely tuned process to consistently exceed client expectations. We solve leadership talent needs so our clients can create innovations that save lives and change the world.

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