

Recruiting a President: Who's Up to the Job?

The screening is complete. We have two candidates for the job of President. Yes, the job. After all, it is a job we're filling and the public may be viewed as the nation's Board of Directors, ultimately making the hiring decision in the voting booth.

The media-led debates will continue to thoroughly elicit the candidates' views on the issues and prospective policies by pressure-cooker probing for all to see on TV. But let's face it, after the primary marathon, many of their answers to issue and policy questions are well rehearsed. So naturally, we can expect the media interviewers to play "gotcha!" to try to make news. They will probe and push to the raw edges of temperament and personality to invite gaffs and uncover inconsistencies.

We need a new perspective, a fresh and different lens through which we may see the candidates as what, in plain fact, they really are, namely job candidates. We propose assembling a panel of leading executive recruiters to put the candidates through job interview. We further propose that the recruiting professionals interview each candidate live-on-tape to be aired on all networks in prime time. These two one-hour sessions will be aired unedited, back-to-back and without commercial interruption.

The process will start with a job description (JD) for the Presidency, the JD being the customary starting point for executive searches. The JD will be written by the recruiters after interviewing former presidents, their chiefs of staff, leading historians and a handful of human resources executives from leading corporate and non-profit organizations. The JD will be published in newspapers and magazines. Voters will be encouraged to refer to the JD when they view the TV program and, as indicated above, assume the role of the nation's Board of Directors.

What are the benefits for voters? First, it will help change the perspective through which the candidates are seen and evaluated. From this perspective, as in all professional job interviews, a candidate's political ideology, age, race, religious affiliation, or even political party are meaningless. In fact, it is illegal for professional recruiters to query along those lines.

Second, candidates will not effectively be able to rehearse for this job interview. Oh, they can be coached and study answers to "textbook" recruiting questions, but those pat answers will not get them the job. Actually, they will work against a candidate's perceived spontaneity and forthrightness. Besides, top recruiters are too experienced to even ask that kind of question.

The questions they will ask will come from tested job interviewing techniques, such as behavioral interviewing, character analysis and perhaps even stress-testing.

By all means let the scheduled media-moderated debates do their job. In addition, since both presumptive nominees have indicated they are open to other forums, let one option be a nationally televised job interview performed by leading executive recruiters to help further define and qualify the right person for the top job in the country.

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