



HEADWAY

NEWS AND VIEWS FROM AHEAD

PART OF THE EUROPEAN EXECUTIVE SEARCH NETWORK



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► HOW HIGH ACHIEVERS FIND JOBS

Executive search seems to be the future method of choice for AHEAD candidates, though their own networks are important too.

Through our survey *How will you find your next job?*, we wanted to understand where executive search sits in the line-up of options available to high achievers, and how their behaviour is changing in the face of new technologies. In a two week period in May, the 276 respondents were candidates interviewed by our consultants in recent months, excluding those hired by clients. The majority of respondents are in their thirties. Over 90% have at least a good university degree, over 55% an MBA or other advanced degree.

In summary, 27% of respondents found their *current job* through an executive search firm. 38% found it through various types of network – notably 18% through their professional network; 15% through a personal/social network (non-internet based); 3% through an internet networking site and 2% through an alumni network. 12% found their job through an internet job site, and another 11% through press advertising.

Looking ahead, a resounding 51% expect to find their *next job* through an executive search firm; 27% through the networks mentioned above; 7% through internet advertising and less than 1% through press advertising. So interestingly, fewer candidates expect to find the right next step through internet methods in the future than previously, whether advertising or networking sites.

‘While these results are interesting, they are hardly surprising’, explains AHEAD’s Alison Tizard. ‘This sample only represents a cadre of high achievers known to us, rather than the whole recruitment market. Having spent time with one of us discussing their career and future aspirations, it is natural that they expect us to be able deliver an interesting and relevant career step in the future. And as they aspire to more senior roles, it is understandable that this ambitious bunch sees an executive search firm as the most appropriate partner. Besides, taking absolutely the right step is an understandably key consideration for this group’, adds Alison, ‘hence their appreciation of career discussions with a professional third party.’

Asked why they changed jobs last time, 35% said the main reason was career advancement. 19% wanted a change of direction. 14% wanted a different corporate culture. 9% moved on redundancy; 6% for personal/family reasons. A better salary was the main driver for fewer than 2%.



SEARCH FOR HIGH ACHIEVERS

► BUSY TIMES...



Photos by kind permission of Vlerick, Belgacom, Chicago GSB Alumni and Quanteus.

The first half of 2008 has been a busy time for AHEAD consultants, not only solving retained assignments, but also representing the firm in the market.

'Visibility in the market is important for AHEAD, both among potential clients and high achieving candidates' admits managing consultant Guy Vereecke. So sponsorship of high profile and well targeted events has a part to play in our strategy for growth. Indeed in our latest candidate survey, 46 % said that visibility in the market is an *important* factor in their choice of search firm to partner; and another 16% said it was *extremely important*.

Belgacom's Star Conference

Under the umbrella theme of Innovation, AHEAD's Muriel Malak joined an eminent panel of speakers tackling a range of questions from the CEOs of Belgacom's corporate clients. 'The war for talent is still a prime concern to CEOs. They wanted to hear how best to attract highly talented people, how to bond people to your company and how to handle the new social networking trends,' explains Muriel. 'I was able to bring a first hand experience from the AHEAD perspective as well as some research and a theoretical insight.'

MBA2U Spring Forum

This was a joint initiative by McKinsey and Fortis. Its mission was to increase the participation of young Belgian professionals in top MBA programmes in the US and in Europe by providing information, helping them in their decision process and school selection, as well as preparation. AHEAD's Guy Vereecke participated as panel speaker and Chicago GSB alumnus.

20th Vlerick Marketing Colloquium



Co-sponsored by AHEAD, 200 marketers from a wide range of companies and consultancies joined forces for 'a day of memorable presentations', according to

AHEAD's Nicolas Goffaux, himself an experienced marketer and Vlerick SLM alumnus. Ignace van Doorselaere, CEO of Van de Velde lingerie suggested that 'there are no mature

markets, there are only mature managers'. No matter how well you conduct all the planning stages, unless the final delivery by your teams is working well this 'last domino' sacrifices all. 'Execution is key.' Later Chris Burggraeve, CMO of Inbev, demonstrated the importance of understanding local cultures, and for marketers to study anthropology. In line with this, Alain Bauwens, VP Corporate at Henkel stressed the importance of consumer surveys and especially home visits...even by senior managers. For more info, see www.vlerickmarketingalumni.com.

Why MBA?

Organised by the Alumni Association of the University of Chicago in Belgium and the KVIV and co-sponsored by AHEAD and Quanteus, this event united young engineers considering further study. 'We were able to provide a good insight into the benefits of an MBA, as well as the wide range of options,' said Muriel Malak, herself an engineer. 'With a glaring shortage of engineers in Europe, it is important for AHEAD to be front of mind and add value as their careers progress.'

Chicago GSB Business Forecast Dinner

The AHEAD team was joined by clients and friends of the house to hear the bold predictions of Professor Emeritus Robert Z. Aliber, speaking on the sub-prime crisis and its impact on the economy in 2008. 'Thought-provoking and well argued,' commented AHEAD's Alexandre Paternotte de La Vaillée.

► TEN MORE YEARS

In early 2008, the team celebrated its first ten years as AHEAD. Yet, this is just part of the story. We were formerly YESS International, created by Egon Zehnder in 1990. Today the five consultants in our Brussels office have amassed a total of nearly 70 years executive search experience between them, and our loyal and dedicated support team each has an average of 10 years' experience with us!

➤ WHY WOMEN MEAN BUSINESS

Women are becoming central to labour market solutions and to the challenges of an ageing workforce, argue consultant Avivah Wittenberg-Cox¹ and FT journalist Alison Maitland.

Speaking at the JUMP conference in Brussels in April, and following their book launch here in February, these authors present powerful supporting arguments to suggest that the optimization of women's talents will boost the bottom line. The position of women - in companies, countries and governments - is seen as a measure of health, maturity and economic viability.

Women is one of the three Ws of the 21st century. Web, women and weather. And there are three key reasons Why Women Mean Business¹ today:

- Firstly, to make the most of their education. 60% of graduates in the EU and US are women. They outperform boys at school but there is a gap between 21st century realities and the number of women at the top of companies.
- Secondly, in the US women make around 80% of consumer spending decisions. Also in France, UK, and Scandinavia. They are key decision makers not just for household products and food, but computers, financial services, cars. In Japan, for example, they are responsible for making or influencing 2/3 of car purchases. Women are living longer and setting trends. But are companies keeping up?
- Thirdly, gender balance is good for the performance of companies and economies. 'Forget China, India and the internet: economic growth is driven by women,' said The Economist in April 2006.

Indeed research by Catalyst in the US and McKinsey, suggests that companies with most women at the top outperform those with the fewest. The former are more profitable and more efficient. This outperformance is most significant with more than 1/3 at senior level.

The first challenge is to understand what does not work, explains Avivah Wittenberg-Cox. 'Perhaps it is time to stop fixing women. Time to realize that they no longer need fixing. They are doing very well at the beginning of their careers and then they hit some issues.'

'In the last 30 years women have been arguing hard to be recognized and to be treated as equal and the same. We made it. Today *that* is the problem. We are *not* the same. We need to recognize that differences exist. But corporations, countries and economies can extract benefits from these differences by operating **bilingually** across genders,' she argues.

Most men today are egalitarian managers and treat women equally. But have they spent any time at all learning the *language of women*? Many men in the business world don't even know that other languages exist. So what is the way forward?

- Firstly, top management has to be convinced.
- Secondly, specific networks and training for women are useful as long as they are not seen as the solution in themselves. The answer lies with men and the leadership team.
- Thirdly, make all your managers *gender bilingual*. Build awareness that there are differences...what they are and how to manage them efficiently. 'Bilingual leaders understand that most women don't compartmentalize their lives into personal and professional.'

With many eminent plaudits, Avivah Wittenberg-Cox admits that there is a lot to be done on systems and processes but does not believe in a glass ceiling. 'It's more a case of gender asbestos, which begins from the moment you walk into a building. You have to strip away the layers to make the balance better between genders.' (Her consultancy offers a 7 Step Plan for interested companies). Companies that adapt to women are better prepared for the new workforce, including the senior and younger generations.

Generally management teams seem relieved to have some guidance. Many are frustrated that so far more progress has not been made in this issue. That said, some EU countries, particularly the Nordic and former communist countries, are very gender balanced. In France, 80% of women work yet the birthrate is the highest in Europe.

'To improve diversity, women may hold the key, but men generally still control the lock,' says Olivier Marchal, head of the French operation of Bain & Co.

'Globalisation and demographic issues force us to address these issues,' said Nikolaus van der Pas, DG of Employment, European Commission, at the book launch. 'It is not just an equality issue, but a human rights issue...and self-interest, an investment in our future'.

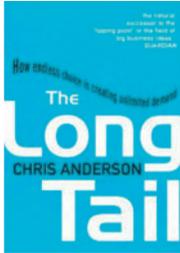
'Women have an inherent advantage in the softer aspects of leadership. These are also the areas where business is changing most rapidly'

➤➤➤ *Niall FitzGerald, KBE, Chairman of Reuters*

1. Why Women Mean Business, Avivah Wittenberg-Cox and Alison Maitland, published by Jossey-Bass, 2008. See also www.avivahwittenberg-cox.com

► THE LONG TAIL

Why the future of business is selling less of more By Chris Anderson¹



The tracking of top-seller lists used to be a national obsession. Our culture used to be a massive popularity contest, with people obsessed with what's hot and what's not. But if we look at the top fifty best-selling albums in history, we see that they were all recorded in the seventies and eighties and none of them were made in the past five years.

In short, although we still are interested in hits, they no longer represent the economic force they once were. The new generations raised with broadband, cell phones, MP3s, video on demand, divide their attention between an infinite menu of choices available at low cost. The mass markets are turning increasingly into a mass of niches. That market of niches has always existed, but as the cost of reaching it falls, it's suddenly becoming a cultural and economic force to be reckoned. Google, iTunes, Amazon have turned an invisible market visible.

If we consider a 'digital jukebox' with 10,000 albums, our common sense and the Law of Pareto would lead us to think that 20% of the albums would generate 80% of the revenue and that probably 50% was played once every quarter. In reality it appeared to be nearer 98% (not 80%) and what was even more astonishing, was that if the company added more titles,

they continued to sell. It appeared that the aggregate market for niche music was huge and effectively unbound. In statistics, curves like that are called 'long-tailed distributions'. *The Long Tail* describes a powerful new force in our economy: the rise of the niche. As the cost of reaching consumers drops dramatically, our markets are shifting from a one-size-fits-all model to one of unlimited variety for unique tastes (mass customization). *The Long Tail* is really about the economics of abundance. New efficiencies in distribution, manufacturing and marketing are resetting the definition of what is commercially viable. If the 20th century was about hits, the 21st will be equally about niches.

Anderson claims that the amazing thing about it is the fact that by the sheer size of it, the combination of the non-hits establishes a market that rivals the hits e.g. Google makes most of its money not from huge corporate advertisers, but from small ones. Amazon's fastest growing part of their business is sales of products that are not available in traditional, physical stores.

Throughout the book Chris Anderson is convincing about the impact of the new paradigm, but it has to be mentioned that most of his examples come from the iTunes, Amazon applications which may not be transferable to every industry. But we can agree with the Houston Chronicle when they wrote that 'he has nonetheless written one of those business books that, ironically, deserves more than a niche readership.'



If the 20th century was about hits, the 21st will be equally about niches.

Chris Anderson

► 2007 ... ANOTHER GOOD YEAR

Described by one US client as 'punching harder than our weight', AHEAD enjoyed its best year ever in 2007. Here are some interesting internal statistics:

- 71% of assignments were repeat business with existing clients
- 73% of hired candidates were found through search (40% from proactive new search, 33% from the platform of our database) 25% came through our website/internet links, 2% were spontaneous applicants
- 53% of hired candidates were aged in their 30s; 30% 40+; and 17% under 30

- Sector focus: 33% of assignments were for companies in the service sector including consulting, legal, banking and finance, 37% in industrial, 20% in consumer and 10% in high tech
- 42% of client companies were Belgian based, 29% from other European countries, 25% US and 4% Asia Pacific
- Assignment specialisms: 16% general management, 38% sales and marketing management, 17% HR, 16% for consulting and professional services, 13% engineering and operations related positions including supply chain

1. The Long Tail, by Chris Anderson, published by Hyperion, 2006, reprinted July 2008.

Chris Anderson is editor in chief of *Wired* magazine, a position he has held since 2001. He has worked at *The Economist*, where he served as U.S. business editor. His career began at the two premier science journals, *Science and Nature*, where he served in several editorial capacities.

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