

Making a Career Move? What Every Executive Should Consider

By Lisa Mallory, Ph.D., and Dan Young

For executives, the prospect of changing jobs runs the gamut from exciting to nerve-wracking. So much is at stake, not just for you, the executive, but also for family and friends. There is no such thing as absolute certainty on whether the grass is truly greener at your next career stop.

Leadership candidates often ask for our advice on how to assess whether or not an opportunity is right for them. While the decision often comes down to one's gut feeling, we offer the following thoughts and suggestions to help guide you. Let's start with distinguishing between which factors are truly important and which are just clouding a decision.

Define Your Motivation

To get started, you should deeply understand your motivation for considering the role. What's driving you toward change? Is it dissatisfaction with your current role, or a burning desire to find a new challenge? If the former, be sure you're not just leaving for leaving's sake but seeking out a role that propels your career forward. Does the move represent a logical progression that is aligned with your overall career objectives and stokes your passion? If not, you may wish to tamp the brakes and continue to look around for a position that better aligns with your goals and desires.

Name Your Non-Negotiables

We recommend making clear to the search consultant, hiring leader and others throughout the interview process

what factors you can't do without, within reason. This requires you to first make a list of these elements (and to confirm them with your significant others). This list – whether written or in the front of your mind – becomes a template for determining whether to stay in an executive search or not. For everyone's sake, it's better to rule out a job before you get too far down the road in the interviewing process.

Be sure your non-negotiables are truly that. Is proximity to siblings, ski hills or a major airport really a deal-breaker or just really nice to have? Be realistic. And feel free to have these discussions with your search consultant – they can serve as coaches, too.

Examine the Work Culture

What defines the working environment at your potential new employer? Whether more laid-back or more driven, does it align with your sensibilities? Do you genuinely like and enjoy the interactions you've had with your potential new colleagues? Think about this: At the end of a grueling week or in the height of a crisis, will you be around people you enjoy and respect? Would you mind being in the trenches with them – or would you be running for the closest exit?

For diverse executives, does the organization's culture value diversity and strive to be inclusive? Are there colleagues of your same social or ethnic group who provide proof of a diverse, welcoming culture? For women, do you see other women executives thriving in the organization?

We're not suggesting you have to fit perfectly or be best friends with everyone, but you should trust your gut about team and organizational dynamics and decide if they're matched with how you operate. Do your homework: Talk to executives you know who have worked for a given employer. Or peruse Glassdoor.com or LinkedIn, where you can find reviews or even people that worked in these organizations.

Finally, remember "cultural fit" can be a loaded term. The better question is often whether you add to a potential new work culture and complement those around you. Will the organization appreciate you for the differences and uniqueness you offer?

Explore the Community

Step outside of the work setting and explore the community where you will be asked to live – both through online research and in person if you can. Does it offer most of what you and your family enjoy? If the answer is no, that should be a major red flag. Your and your family's quality of life is the foundation upon which you'll exist for the years ahead.

If you have children, does the community offer schools, child care, sports leagues, music programs, youth groups and other support programs that are important to you? Does it offer a place of worship for you to engage and honor your faith? Is the racial mix of citizens one that you're comfortable with? (Are the local politics to your liking, and is that important to you?)

These are often major issues, if not total deal breakers. For example, if you, your child or spouse or partner has a favorite hobby – whether playing in a community orchestra, kayaking or fine dining – will a lack of this option create inevitable resentment (and a potential short tenure for you)? If these options do exist, your hiring organization should be more than willing to introduce you to colleagues with similar needs and interests, or connect you with a member of the community to offer guidance in these areas. Don't hesitate to ask for introductions, or to speak with community representatives as part of your final decision-making process. Also don't hesitate to ask for school metrics or – of course! – hospital quality ratings.

Will the community satisfy your professional needs? Are there affinity groups, industry/trade associations and charitable organizations that will encourage your growth and involvement with local residents? Is there a local [NAHSE Chapter](#), for example? Or ACHE, HFMA, HIMSS or other industry professional group where you can find peers that can support you in your career and help you acclimate?

Finally, consider the positive impact you may have on a community. Perhaps there's a chance for you to join boards, contribute to charities, or start a civic activity that appeals to your sense of purpose. Maybe the community has a need for someone such as you.

Being honest with yourself about the community will undoubtedly ensure a smoother transition and longer tenure with an organization, as well as deeper connections in your new life.

Consider How Success Is Defined

In interviews with a hiring manager or search committee, inquire about what types of people have experienced success in the organization. Why were they successful? Was it skill or style? Listen closely to the responses and be honest with yourself about whether you would thrive and find success.

Consider how the organization defines success for your role. Is it more about keeping the ship sailing and the crew happy, and/or are there carefully defined target metrics you'll need to hit? Is success defined in a three- or five-year window or does it have more to do with constancy and longevity? Importantly, does their idea of success dovetail with yours?

Dig Deep into Compensation, Benefits and Perks

Pay and perquisites should be part of your non-negotiable contemplations – what do you need to lead the lifestyle you want and secure your future and retirement? Or is this move an essential step in ultimately getting there (e.g., to that eventual C-suite position or pay grade)?

Executive compensation packages, of course, are complex and go well beyond base salary. Take the

time to dig into what is involved for a new position. We highly recommend engaging a compensation coach. An investment in a coach can help you know what you're worth, formulate a strategy for what compensation you hope to achieve, and put you on firm footing when negotiating with an employer.

One caveat: Measure pay and benefits against the cost of living in the area. Will your dollar go as far in a major city as in a rural community?

Take Calculated Risks

We certainly recognize that for great reward there is often risk associated. Our appeal: trust your instincts but do your research, ask questions and ultimately take as calculated a risk as possible to ensure the least disruption and highest satisfaction for all involved.

Over the years, we have asked countless CEOs, board members and hiring managers about what they want in their executive hires. We consistently hear that they want to ensure a new leader and their family are fully satisfied with the opportunity. Without question they would much rather have a candidate opt out in the interview process rather than accepting a job only to find disillusionment or dissatisfaction resulting in a short and disruptive tenure. The cost of the wrong hire is staggering to organizations.

Changing jobs and moving to a new community has a profound impact on so many people that it is well worth spending a little extra time in evaluating a new opportunity. When assessed correctly and thought through, a decision often results in a fulfilling career move as well as a joy-filled connection in the community, ultimately leading to deeper satisfaction, dedication and longer tenure.

Lisa Mallory Ph.D. is executive director of NAHSE. She can be reached at lmallory@nahse.org. Daniel Young is a senior partner in WittKieffer's Healthcare Practice. He can be reached at dyoung@wittkieffer.com.