



**PARTENAIRE EN CHASSE
DE TALENTS EXÉCUTIFS**

■ WHY THIS GUIDE

On paper, every firm looks the same

You have decided to entrust your search to a recruitment firm. Excellent decision: for a management role, it is almost always the right call. One real question remains: which one?

They all promise the same things: the best candidates, personalized service, fast results. The websites look alike, and so do the pitches. The real differences, the ones that will decide the success of your search, only show when you ask the right questions, and compare the answers.

This guide gives you the six questions that set firms apart, what a good answer includes, the red flags to watch for, then a scorecard to compare the firms you are evaluating, side by side.

How to use it

Ask all six questions, in the same words, to every firm you meet. Score each answer on the grid at the end of this guide. The firm that answers all six precisely and without dodging is probably the one that will handle your mandate with the same rigour.

One tip before you start: beware of perfect answers recited too quickly. A serious firm adds nuance, gives recent examples, and does not hesitate to tell you what it does not do.

■ THE SIX QUESTIONS · PART ONE

Who does the work, and how

1. Who will actually do the search?

Why ask it: In many firms, the mandate sold by a senior partner is then delegated with no clear owner. Yet assessing executives and persuading employed leaders take experience and credibility: you need to know who actually leads your mandate, and who will interview your candidates.

A GOOD ANSWER INCLUDES

The name and track record of the senior headhunter who will lead the mandate and interview your candidates, and confirmation that they remain accountable from start to finish.

RED FLAG

No name, no track record, no one accountable: you will never know who is actually working on your mandate.

2. How much time do you invest in understanding our organization?

Why ask it: It is impossible to properly represent an organization you do not know. In the market, the firm will speak on your behalf: whatever it does not know about your culture, your challenges and your team, it can neither sell to candidates nor recognize in them.

A GOOD ANSWER INCLUDES

A structured needs assessment, involving several stakeholders, questions about your culture and challenges, ideally a visit to your facilities.

RED FLAG

A firm ready to launch the search after a 15-minute call will search its résumé bank, not your market.

3. How are candidates assessed?

Why ask it: Receiving résumés is not assessing people. A track record says what a candidate has done; it says nothing about how they behave, or whether they will fit your culture and your team. Yet that is where most hires fail.

A GOOD ANSWER INCLUDES

The length and content of the interviews conducted before any candidate is presented to you, including an assessment of behaviour and cultural fit.

RED FLAG

“We check the résumé and references.” If the assessment fits in 30 minutes, you will end up doing it yourself, after the hire.

■ THE SIX QUESTIONS · PART TWO

What happens next

4. How will our candidates be treated?

Why ask it: Throughout the mandate, every candidate approached lives an experience they will associate with your organization. A poorly supported candidate drops out along the way, and it is your reputation that takes the hit, among the best profiles in your industry.

A GOOD ANSWER INCLUDES

Support described step by step, from first call to signature, and an answer given to every candidate, including those not selected.

RED FLAG

A firm that cannot describe its candidate experience probably does not have one.

5. What happens to the candidates you place?

Why ask it: Some firms go back and solicit, at their own clients, the very candidates they placed there. The person placed with you today can become tomorrow's target.

A GOOD ANSWER INCLUDES

A clear commitment, ideally in writing, never to solicit your employees, with a precise policy on the duration and scope of that protection.

RED FLAG

An evasive answer on this specific point. This is a yes-or-no question.

6. What happens if it doesn't work out?

Why ask it: Even the best process carries residual risk. A firm that believes in its placements guarantees them; a firm that does not makes you carry the risk.

A GOOD ANSWER INCLUDES

The actual duration of the guarantee, what it covers, and what happens concretely: search resumed, at what cost, within what timeframe.

RED FLAG

A short guarantee, full of conditions, or "to be discussed depending on the mandate". A guarantee's exclusions say more than its duration.

■ THE TOOL

Your comparison scorecard

Score each firm out of 5 on every criterion. It is not the absolute scores that matter, but the gaps: they will show you where the firms truly differ.

Criterion (out of 5)	Firm A	Firm B	Firm C
1. Who leads: real seniority of the person in charge of your mandate			
2. Needs assessment: time and depth invested			
3. Assessment: rigour beyond the résumé			
4. Candidate experience: support and answers			
5. Protection: your people off-limits to future searches			
6. Guarantee: duration, coverage, terms of resumption			
Fees: clear and complete structure			
Stated timelines: precise and committed			
References: recent, reachable clients			
Trust: your impression after the meeting			
Total (out of 50)			

Print this page, or rebuild the grid in a shared document if several people are part of the decision.

■ GOING FURTHER

Four tie-breaker questions

If two firms are still tied after the scorecard, these questions settle it:

- **What was your most recent mandate similar to ours?** The story of a recent, comparable mandate says more than a list of industries served. Listen for details: a true story contains them.
- **What are your average timelines, with numbers?** A rigorous firm measures its timelines and shares them without hesitation. “It depends on the mandate” is true, but an average always exists.
- **Who will be our day-to-day contact?** The person you meet during business development is not always the one who will answer you afterwards. Ask to meet your actual contact before signing.
- **Can we speak with two of your clients?** The reaction to this request is a test in itself. A firm proud of its work provides references promptly, and does not take too long choosing them.

A final word

Choosing a recruitment firm means choosing who will speak on your behalf to the best leaders in your market. Take the time to choose them the way you would choose an executive: with precise questions, and verifiable answers.

Surrounding yourself with the best should never be a compromise.

And Taveo? Ask us these exact same questions.

Book a 15-minute call: tell us about the position, we will answer all six questions, and if we are not the right firm for your need, we will tell you that too.

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Taveo is an executive search firm specializing in the recruitment of managers and executives, with offices in Québec City and Montréal. More than 400 mandates completed over more than a decade, for organizations across every sector.

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