

**Bobbie Stone, CEO and Founder of Bobbie Stone International**  
*"We specialize in the difficult executive assignments that others may not have the expertise or experience to handle."*



**Bobbie Stone, CEO & Founder of Bobbie Stone International, has been in executive search for over 20 years. Her firm is focused on building high-caliber leadership teams for the health care industry. Here, drawing on discussions with clients and knowledge of the market, she talks about what is happening in human capital today in rapidly moving health care organizations.**

**How have health care organization needs for human capital solutions evolved over the past 10 years?**

Clients are much more strategic about hiring for pivotal positions than they were a decade ago – willing to hold off on bringing an executive onboard until they are sure they have the right fit. If necessary, they will put an interim hire temporarily in place, while still searching for a permanent solution. I think this is partly due to the economy, partly due to the fact that human resource departments have become more sophisticated and knowledgeable about the recruitment process.

**Do you think that health care executives require special leadership traits that differ from those in other industries?**

I see less movement among industries when it comes to health care leadership – in other words, for most senior positions, the first choice will be someone with in-depth health care experience. This is due to the extreme complexities of the industry. Traditionally, health care CEOs have moved up from finance, marketing or other key operational roles. But, today, clients are looking for varied experience. For example, they are considering CNOs for these key leadership positions or asking for executives with both medical and legal backgrounds, so they combine clinical experience and an understanding of the regulatory environment. I think, however, that the competencies needed in a leader are the same whatever the industry – the ability to motivate, strategize, initiate change.

**Assessing cultural fit – science or art?**

A bit of both – it combines what appears on paper with strong interviewing techniques. There is a science to gathering information about an organization’s culture and building a position specification that hones in on the right skill set. But there is then an art to figuring out whether a particular

candidate really will fit with the culture. An organization may be undergoing a major restructuring – combining several hospital systems, for instance. An executive may have had experience with restructuring, but, by probing beneath the surface, you’ll find that the candidate would never function effectively as part of the leadership team.

**What is the biggest mistake you’ve seen clients make during the interview process?**

I would say lack of preparation. Everyone is so very busy. The tendency is to give a cursory look at the resume and the search consultant’s evaluation of the candidate – and figure the interview will take care of itself. But this is an executive you are bringing in to become a key member of your leadership team – someone who will be helping shape the future of the organization. The right investment of time upfront will pay off down the road.

**How important is effective onboarding in reducing expensive turnover? Any tips? Why don’t more organizations pay attention to this?**

Onboarding is critical. Again, too much is lost – in terms of strategic direction, productivity and cost – when turnover rate is high. Human resource departments, however, are stretched very thin – and if onboarding isn’t a senior management priority, it falls through the cracks. The CEO of one of my clients makes it a point to sit in on orientations, getting a feel for the questions and concerns new employees have. This may not be feasible at a very large organization – but all organizations should be moving onboarding up the strategic ladder as a key focus.