

Dynamic personality meets technical know-how

Cognex is not typical of the traditional manufacturing sector. Not only does it create highly complex products, but it prides itself on a dynamic, 'work hard play hard' culture. This presented a challenge in the search for a new Vice President of Sales and Service in Europe – a person required to have both excellent technical know-how and the right cultural fit.

Cognex writes the software used in the vision aspect of manufacturing processes; the 'brains' that guide robots and read symbols to ensure highly efficient and effective production lines. The company has a strong motivational working environment and makes a significant investment in team building events and outings, even dressing up on Halloween. All this effort drives impressive growth; 66 percent in the last quarter of 2010.



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Executive Search

Carmichael Fisher specialises in providing executive search services to international organisations around the world. Its offices in Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Australia, work in collaboration and this collective experience in cross-border search and assessment is complimented by a deep knowledge and networks in the major industry sectors.

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Demanding technical requirements

When a promotion created a vacancy for a senior sales leader in Europe, Cognex turned to Carmichael Fisher to ensure the appointee would both fit the cultural and the demanding technical requirements.

Robert Willett, Cognex President, explains how important the first part of this search was in finding the right candidate: "I've learned in my career that a good search requires a very detailed position description up front – it can save a lot of effort further along in the process. We took great care to get that exactly right. We looked at the role, the kind of person we wanted, ideal experience and essential skills required"

"At this crucial stage, Carmichael Fisher took lots of time to review potential candidates against our description. Too often recruiters send you candidates that don't have the essential experience you're looking for. From the very start, Carmichael Fisher listened. The team took the time to understand our culture and the kind of person we wanted. They also talked extensively and regularly with our Senior Vice President of Sales and Service to understand what he wanted from his successor."

'Work hard, play hard, move fast' culture

Cognex was looking for someone who could operate confidently in Germany, leading the European business. The search process with Carmichael Fisher included weekly conference calls to update the stakeholders on the process and a benchmark candidate was quickly selected for interview. After some success with candidates who looked good on paper, Robert Willett explains how significant progress was made: "The real breakthrough came when we realised that we were focusing our search too narrowly. We were looking just in the automation sensors and controls industry. Carmichael Fisher pushed us to look more broadly. Essentially, we could teach product knowledge as long as the candidate was smart and technically competent. What we really needed was someone with good cultural fit and the raw DNA to do the job."

This shift in focus led Carmichael Fisher and Robert Willett to a candidate, from Texas Instruments. He had lots of excellent qualities, including core technical expertise, experience managing a complex sales channel structure and a good understanding of product architecture. But, according to Robert Willett, what really made him stand out was cultural fit: "The candidate is German, and has lots of international experience. He has good leadership qualities and was at the right stage in his career. Not only that but he is dynamic and an unusually strong fit with our unique 'work hard, play hard, move fast' culture."

The candidate was offered the job following time spent with Cognex' senior team in Boston. Carmichael Fisher then actively supported the negotiation to ensure that both parties were delighted with the result. This can be a delicate stage in an appointment and Carmichael Fisher demonstrated both insight and commitment to get the job completed successfully. Robert Willett: "At every stage in the search and appointment, we were impressed with Carmichael Fisher. The team really knows how to work with an American company whilst at the same time having a deep knowledge of local European operating behaviours."