8 Rules for an Effective CEO Search Committee

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RUDISH HEALTH



THE RUDISH HEALTH EXCHANGE

INTRODUCTION

Selecting a new CEO is one of the most consequential responsibilities a healthcare board can undertake. The individual chosen will influence organizational strategy, culture, financial performance, workforce priorities and, ultimately, the communities the organization serves.

Yet even a strong board can encounter challenges if the search process isn't well defined. Rudish Health makes sure every CEO search is run effectively and efficiently.

Informed by our experience and insights, here are eight principles for building an effective CEO search committee and setting your search up for success.

Our expertise and perspective comes not only from decades of executive search experience, but also from ongoing dialogue with healthcare CEOs and board chairs through the **Rudish Health Exchange**, which brings together experienced healthcare leaders to candidly discuss the challenges and opportunities shaping the industry.

THE EIGHT RULES

01 Define the Committee's Charge

02 Keep the Committee Manageable

03 Choose the Right Composition

04 Be Realistic About the Time Commitment

05 Choose Your Search Partner Carefully

06 Establish the Search Plan and Timeline Early

07 Do the Due Diligence Up Front

08 Plan the End Game Before You Get There

01
RULE ONE

Define the Committee's Charge

Start by answering a fundamental question: Is this a search committee or a selection committee?

A search committee typically manages the search process and recommends candidates to the full board, which makes the final selection. In other cases, the board may authorize the committee itself to select the next CEO, with the full board only becoming involved later in the process.

Neither approach works well when roles are ambiguous.

Before the search begins, the full board should clearly define the committee's authority, responsibilities, and decision-making process. Doing so can prevent confusion and delays, particularly when the field has narrowed to finalists.

02
RULE TWO

Keep the Committee Manageable

When it comes to search committees, bigger isn't necessarily better.

An odd-numbered committee with fewer than 10 members is generally most effective. This provides enough perspectives for meaningful discussion while keeping meetings, interviews, and decision-making manageable.

A smaller committee also makes it easier to maintain momentum throughout what can be a lengthy process.

03

RULE THREE

Choose the Right Composition

A strong committee should bring together different perspectives without sacrificing its ability to reach consensus.

Consider which voices are important to the decision. For a community-focused nonprofit healthcare organization, that might include representatives from civic or community leadership. Health systems may choose to include physician or medical staff leadership alongside board members.

If you invite stakeholders from outside the board, be clear about their role. Their time and perspective should be genuinely valued, not included simply for appearances.

The goal is a committee that reflects the organization while remaining capable of making difficult decisions.

04

RULE FOUR

Be Realistic About the Time Commitment

Serving on a CEO search committee requires more than attending a few candidate interviews.

Committee members may participate in planning meetings, stakeholder discussions, candidate reviews, and multiple rounds of interviews. The most important stages of the search require consistent participation.

Before appointing members, make sure they understand the commitment and can prioritize the process.

SIMPLE FIX

Establishing key dates early is one of the simplest ways to improve participation. Put critical milestones (particularly first- and second-round interviews) on calendars well in advance.

05
RULE FIVE

Choose Your Search Partner Carefully

If you engage an executive search firm, look beyond firm size and name recognition.

Consider the firm's experience with CEO and senior executive searches in healthcare, as well as its understanding of organizations like yours. Just as important, ask about the individual consultants who will actually lead your engagement:

- Who will advise the committee?
- Who will assess candidates?
- What healthcare experience do they bring?
- What access do they have to potential candidates, including executives who may not be actively looking for a new role?

Boutique firms can offer deep industry expertise, senior-level attention, and broad access to candidate networks. Ultimately, the right partner is the one with the experience, relationships, and judgment to guide your board through a complex leadership decision.

06
RULE SIX

Establish the Search Plan and Timeline Early

A well-run search should have a clearly defined roadmap.

Your search partner should work with the committee to establish milestones. Pay particular attention to dates that require full committee participation.

1 Stakeholder input	2 Position development	3 Candidate ID & assessment
4 Interviews	5 Finalist selection	6 Offer negotiations

Establishing those expectations at the beginning keeps the process moving and reduces the risk of losing momentum — or of losing a strong candidate because the organization cannot make a timely decision.

07

RULE SEVEN

Do the Due Diligence Up Front

Before searching for the right leader, you need a shared understanding of what the organization needs from that leader.

Allow sufficient time for your search consultants to speak with committee members, both collectively and individually. One-on-one conversations can be particularly valuable because participants may be more candid about organizational challenges, leadership needs, and priorities.

You may also want input from physicians, executives, employees or community stakeholders. Establish in advance how feedback will be gathered and used. Participants should know their perspectives matter while also understanding where final decision-making authority resides.

08

RULE EIGHT

Plan the End Game Before You Get There

One of the most vulnerable points in an executive search comes when the field has narrowed to one or two finalists.

At this stage, unnecessary delays or internal uncertainty can jeopardize an otherwise successful search. Don't wait until you've identified your preferred candidate to decide what happens next.

Determine in advance who has authority to formulate an offer, who will present and negotiate it, and what flexibility exists around compensation and other terms. Discuss potential signing incentives, relocation assistance, employment agreements, severance provisions, and other issues that could become part of the negotiation.

You won't know every detail in advance. But establishing parameters and decision-making authority early allows the organization to move confidently when the right candidate emerges.

IN CLOSING

A Successful Search Starts Long Before the Interviews

The strongest search committees don’t leave those decisions to chance.

An executive search involves hundreds of decisions — from defining the leadership profile to assessing candidates to successfully closing the finalist.

With clear roles, thoughtful planning, the right people at the table and experienced guidance, a board can create a disciplined process that helps it make one of its most important decisions: choosing the leader who will help shape the organization’s future.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Keith offers over four decades of experience conducting executive search for healthcare organizations. He has conducted over 1,100 searches for prominent multi-hospital health systems, professional associations, pediatric health systems, public hospitals, academic medical centers, and managed care organizations.

Keith has been in the executive search field as a consultant for close to 40 years, serving as a Regional Director for a large firm before being promoted to Executive Vice President, consulting with national responsibility for all firm search practices, including healthcare systems, information technology, higher education, and managed care/insurance. As Executive Vice President of Operations, he led the finance, marketing, and human resources divisions.

Earlier in his career, he was employed by Clarian Health System and Meridian Mutual Insurance in Indianapolis. He is an active member of the American College of Healthcare Executives, and recently served on the national board of Heroes on the Water. Keith earned a Master's in Business Administration from the University of Dallas and a Bachelor of Science in Public Affairs from Indiana University.

SELECTED CEO / COO SEARCHES

Texas Hospital Association · Nationwide Children's Hospital · Florida Hospital Association · BayCare Health System · St. Christopher's Hospital for Children · Christiana Care Health System · Children's Hospital and Health System of Wisconsin · VHA Texas · Children's Hospital of Atlanta · DFW Hospital Council · Covenant Health System · Ohio Hospital Association · Utah Hospital Association · Cooper Institute · Intermountain Healthcare

RUDISH HEALTH

ABOUT RUDISH HEALTH

Helping Healthcare Help Others

Named a top healthcare Executive Search firm for 10 years running by Modern Healthcare.

We marry decades of talent acquisition expertise with a deep understanding of the healthcare business born of our management consulting experience. That unique combination allows us to partner with clients, not just to fill a role but to set a strategic course.

Our mission is to help healthcare companies succeed, whether through placing the exactly-right executive for long-term success, securing the interim leader who will make an immediate impact, or connecting clients to the strategic partners they need to innovate, transform, and lead.

ABOUT THE RUDISH HEALTH EXCHANGE

THE RUDISH HEALTH EXCHANGE

Leadership Is Driven by Dialogue

Convene Healthcare's Brightest Stars

The Rudish Health Exchange assembles some of healthcare's foremost executives at bi-annual, invite-only forums. A frank exchange of insights and concerns, challenges and opportunities forms the bedrock of our collaboration, where every complexity is on the table and no obstacle is too fearsome for consideration.

The Rudish Health Exchange harnesses our unique convening power to understand and shape the future of healthcare. Another way in which our leaders lead our industry.