How Has the Pandemic Altered Business Operations? Here is an Up-Close Inside View into a CEO Navigating Through the Tumultuous Maze Caused by Covid-19.

Jim Harrington has a few hours before his flight departs Phoenix Sky Harbor International Airport for New York. Then the Executive Search expert is off to Chicago, Boston and Washington D.C. for client meetings.

Travel accounted for about 60% of his time before the coronavirus outbreak, but the ongoing effects of the pandemic has trimmed that down substantially.

And planning has taken on new meaning. Bookings are now confirmed as close to departure date as possible, and flights with less than half capacity take precedent since Harrington prefers empty seats in his row.

Before COVID-19 changed the world, he flew in the early morning and late nights to improve efficiency. Now, midday flights are the norm as airlines cut operations and cancel routes. "You lose a lot of time right now in travel," he says.

On this trip, like most, he'll discuss the growth plans of his corporate clients, and interview several potential candidates to fill executive roles or board positions.
He'll practice social distancing guidelines and hold meetings outside whenever possible.

The first topic of every conversation nowadays begins with the pandemic, and how candidates or corporate clients are handling these unsettling times. "That's become a new conversation piece," says Harrington, who's served more than 25 years as a chief human resources



officer at several global companies.

The discussion then turns to the workplace and if they're working remotely, using a hybrid work-from-home model or are back in the office permanently, preferences preferred.

"That's a brand-new conversation I've never had before," echoed Harrington, who established his boutique search firm in 2013. During those years as an employee in the HR sector, he hired several search firms to help find him the right executive candidates to fill positions, but most headhunters fell short of their mission and underserved clients.

"Most of the firms could provide the right skills, but that's the easy part," he says. "The hard part is determining if they fit in your culture."



This is where Harrington Staffing makes its mark for a variety of corporate clients in high tech, biotech and health care, outsourcing, financial services, e-commerce, and defense, among sectors. Recent notable clients include Concentrix, a Synnex Technology Solutions (NYSE:SNX) publicly-traded spinout candidate with $4.7 billion in annual sales; and Snowflake Inc. (NYSE:SNOW), a cloud data storage provider that raised $3.4 billion last month in its initial public offering, a record for software makers.

Harrington Staffing, which has a Silicon Valley office in Los Gatos and one in Scottsdale, initiates personal and detailed deep dives on company culture and business competencies.

"When I win a search, I go into a company and spend two days interviewing people," says Harrington, who's involved in every step of the process, from sourcing to selection. That often encompasses sit-ins with managers, peers, subordinates and board members.

His qualitative and quantitative research methods to assess style and fit center on utilizing leadership assessment tools to better gauge emotional characteristics and intelligence; developing custom business simulations in the interview process to focus candidates on the client; and applying certified executive coaching into a 30, 60, 90 and 180-day integration program with the hiring leader and candidate.

The earlier the integration, Harrington contends, the better likelihood of retention, motivation, innovation, and ultimately, success. "What I've found out over 25 years is that style and fit is the No. 1 component for people's success," he says.

Hard skills, such as acumen, industry knowledge and experience, are more easily measured than an emotional quotient, or EQ, such as leadership and style. "That takes time and very deep due diligence," says Harrington, who handles about a dozen search projects annually primarily through referrals. "I've had one search out of 75 search placements that lasted less than two years." — By Chris Casacchia, California Business Journal.

Copyright © 2020 California Business Journal. All Rights Reserved.