

## To recruit women execs, break the 'me, too' mold

Recruiting women into top-level executive positions in the sports industry is crucial for business innovation but can be a challenge in a field traditionally dominated by white men.

To alter that dynamic, sports business leaders can make two key changes: Look beyond the traditional sports world for its executives and check their unconscious biases during the interview process.



**BIAGINI**

"Think about it: If your criteria for an executive is 20 years of specifically sports experience, then your talent pool will be primarily white men, because that is predominantly who joined the field 20 years ago," said Chad Biagini, managing partner North America for Nolan Partners, which specializes in sports executive recruiting.

However, if the criteria become "20 years of transferable skills," then a position in, say, human resources opens to the best talent in every industry, not specifically sports.

"Microsoft, Deloitte and Google have reputations for some of the best talent in HR. Sports businesses should consider looking there when recruiting for HR executives," Biagini said. Some of the best marketers are in hospitality, tech and consumer — sports organizations are limiting themselves by not searching across the wider corporate landscape.

Consciously changing the interview

is equally crucial. Biagini notes the tech industry is famous for asking executive candidates questions about such things as their favorite Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtle, then are nonplussed at the dearth of women executives.

Is it important for a CFO to have played a college sport? Or to have a fantasy football team? No. Then why ask?

"Sports leaders have to recognize the skills that are necessary and change the perceived mold," said Biagini. "Certainly there is sports industry knowledge and networking for industry outsiders to gain, but that is more than offset by bringing the best talent, with a diversified viewpoint, to the table."

It takes a conscious effort on the part of sports executives to change the corporate culture.

"It's comfortable to hire people who look like you, talk like you, think like you," said Paul Nolan, co-founder of Nolan Partners. "But there's no benefit in a 'me, too' strategy. Not only is it unethical, but in the sports world, you cannot keep a competitive edge without innovation, which can only come through a widely diverse pool of thought leaders." ■



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