

T E X ★ S Hospitals

Published by the Texas Hospital Association • January/February 2009

Best Practices

Systematic Approach to Executive Search Earns “Perfect Candidates”

BY MELISSA GASKILL

Memorial Hermann serves the greater Houston community with 11 hospitals and specialty services such as cancer centers, a children’s hospital, heart and vascular institutes, diagnostic laboratories and rehabilitation centers, including TIRR Memorial Hermann.

Memorial Hermann’s merger with The Institute for Rehabilitation and Research necessitated a search for a new chief executive officer and chief operations officer for the hospital. To fill the positions, the system turned to health care executive search firm Tyler & Company, a Texas Hospital Association-endorsed company.

“We wanted a firm experienced in rehab, an expert in this field,” said Vivian Kardow, SPHR, chief human resources officer for Memorial Hermann’s Texas Medical Center operations. “Tyler & Company had successfully completed search engagements in the past for Memorial Hermann, so we knew they had the experience and background. Then they did a marvelous search and found the perfect candidate for CEO, so it made sense to use Tyler & Company when it came time for the COO position. They were very knowledgeable.”

The firm has a very systematic approach to search, which makes it easy to work with them, Kardow said. “I find that they are different from other search firms in that they are very hands-on. They come and visit

with you and meet with the search committee; it’s not just conference calls. They get a good line on the search parameters before they start, and they want to meet the person who will be making the decisions. So, they know what your expectations are and can look at how to meet them,” she said.

Tyler & Company’s search process “works like a well-oiled machine,” said Nelson Mann, senior vice president at the firm’s Austin office. After a site visit and interviews with the client’s team, the firm prepares a client/candidate profile and, based on specifications, begins searching for qualified candidates.

“This leads to massive yet targeted, proactive mail and phone communications,” said Allison Morris, Austin consultant. Sources include the firm’s database and network, referrals, source lists, association contacts and Internet searches. Potential candidates are prescreened, and summaries of top picks provided in a long list for client review and approval. The candidates on the client’s short list are interviewed by Tyler & Company. A dossier of the consultant’s interview notes, personality assessment and results of reference and background checks are presented to the client. The firm assists with interviews and negotiations between candidates and the client.

“I feel like they know Memorial Hermann, which has made it easier,” Kardow said. “Each search has been difficult because of the parameters associated with it, and they are good partners in that regard. One of the best things they do, is when they go out and interview 12 people, they say, here are the ones that are a perfect fit; here are some potentials; and here are the people we don’t think are a fit and why. Because those people may be a good fit somewhere else. The process is very transparent.”

This search went smoothly from the candidate side as well, according to Kelly Watkins,

“Their search process works like a well-oiled machine.”

who accepted the COO position at TIRR Memorial Hermann. “It was a gradual process that started in February and concluded in June,” she said.

“What I can say about Tyler & Company, and Allison in particular, is that they are responsive. There were some deal-breakers that I shared early on, because there’s no sense in wasting people’s time. I felt that they listened and kept me informed in a process that takes many months,” she added.

Watkins had been with her previous employer for 10 years and was not looking

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for another position. “They were very effective in raising my awareness of a position that will only come around once in a while,” she said. “They did a good job of laying out the opportunity and piquing my interest.”

After 25-plus years in health care human resources, Kardow calls Tyler & Company the best firm she has worked with on searches. “I would go to them first and ask them if they can do the search before calling someone else. On something that wasn’t their expertise, they referred me to someone else. There are firms that would take your

money and then not produce, and you’re out the money and the time. They wouldn’t do that,” she said.

While the firm says five months is average to close most searches, Kardow said Tyler & Company is willing to work with her schedule. “Once we see a need, we need it yesterday. But they have a good database, and they network. So they aren’t starting from scratch. They stay in touch with candidates from a search who weren’t chosen until an opportunity comes up to place that candidate,” she said.

“We get calls from search firms all the time, and if I needed a search tomorrow, Tyler & Company is who I would call.” ★

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