

A glance at the hiring & development cycle of an *executive* in hospitality

For owners, boards and hiring managers on how to make better leadership decisions before, during and after the appointment.

01
PREPARE

02
APPOINT

03
DEVELOP

04
TRANSITION



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Where to find *what you need*

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WHY LEADERSHIP IS A CYCLE, NOT AN EVENT

The appointment is one step — not the whole journey

A senior leadership appointment is a business decision. It affects strategy, performance, culture, stakeholder confidence and, ultimately, the value an organization creates.

Yet leadership is often managed as a series of separate events.

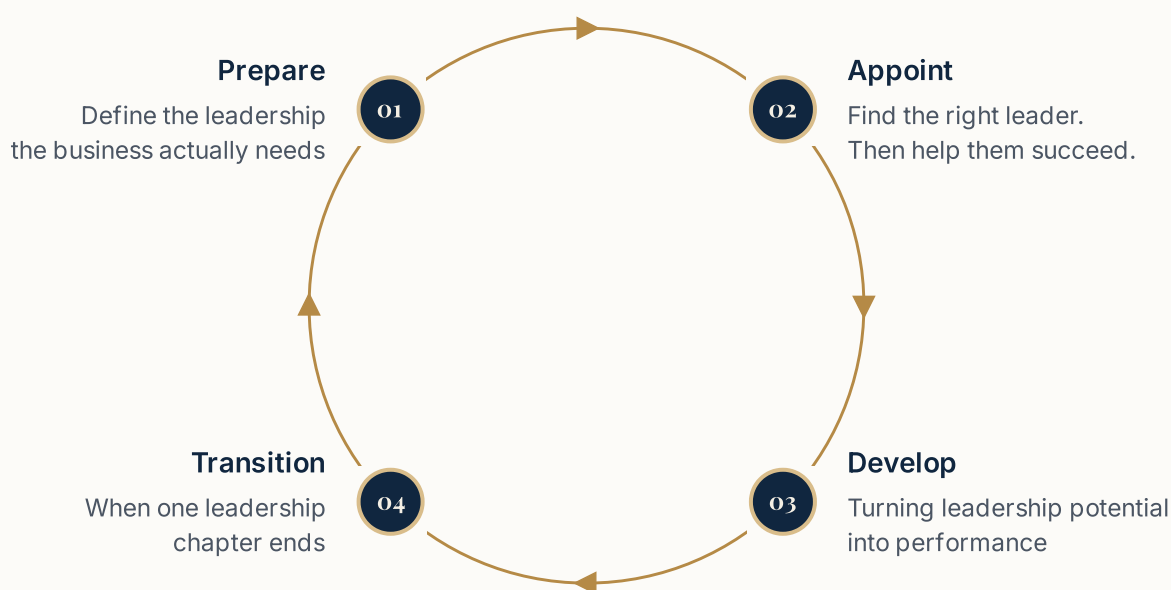
When a position becomes vacant, a search begins. Once someone is appointed, the search ends. What is often missing is the connection between these moments.

The whole process is a cycle.

It starts before a position becomes vacant. It continues through the appointment and the transition into the new role. It evolves as the leader, the team and the business change. And when one leadership chapter ends, it creates the conditions for the next.

THE CORE IDEA

The appointment is important. But it is only one step in the hiring & development cycle of an executive.



01 STAGE ONE Prepare

Define the leadership the business actually needs

When a senior leader leaves, the obvious question is:

Who can replace this person?

The more useful question is:

What does the business need its next leader to accomplish?

Those are not always the same thing.

The title may stay the same. The leadership requirement can change completely.

A hotel entering a new market may need a different leader and expertise from the one who runs an established business. An owner preparing for a transaction may need a different leadership profile from one focused on long-term operational stability. A company emerging from a restructuring may need a leader capable of rebuilding trust as much as delivering financial results.

A job description describes a position and a title.

It does not necessarily describe the leadership challenge.

Start with the business, not the candidate

Before defining the person, clarify the situation.

- What has changed?
- What needs to happen over the next 12–36 months?
- What will success look like?
- What capabilities are essential? What can be learned?
- What leadership behaviors will the organization need?
- What will make the role difficult? And what might make an otherwise strong executive unsuccessful in this particular environment?

This creates a leadership brief, not simply a recruitment brief.

Succession starts before you need someone

Succession is often discussed when a departure is already visible.

By then, the options may be limited. A stronger approach is to understand critical leadership roles before they become vacancies.

That means knowing:

01

Which positions are business-critical

02

Where internal succession is realistic

03

Where external talent will be required

04

Which potential successors need development

05

Where leadership risk is concentrated

06

And what the market could provide if circumstances change

Succession is therefore not simply a replacement exercise.

It is an ongoing leadership decision.

The market is part of the brief

Organizations do not operate in isolation from the leadership market.

The available talent, competing opportunities, compensation expectations, geographic mobility and changing expectations of senior executives all influence what is realistic.

This is why market mapping should not simply happen after the brief has been finalized.

A search brief should be treated as a hypothesis, not a finished answer.

The market feedback should test the assumptions behind it. If the brief cannot survive contact with the market, it needs to be recalibrated before the search progresses.

Assessment adds another layer of evidence

At senior level, most candidates are credible. They have experience. They have achievements. They interview well.

That makes the distinction between experience and evidence important.

The question is not simply: *Has this person done something similar before?* It is: *What does the evidence suggest about how this person is likely to perform in this particular seat, in this particular organization, at this particular point in time?*

Understanding leadership behavior, motivations, strengths, potential risks and the conditions in which an executive is most effective can make a significant difference to the quality of the decision.

Alignment matters

A search can fail before the first candidate is contacted. Owners, boards, CEOs and HR may each have slightly different expectations of the role. If those expectations remain unresolved, the market receives a moving target and candidates receive mixed signals.

The objective is not to create a perfect specification. It is to create sufficient alignment around the leadership challenge that the organization can make a clear decision when the right person appears.

MOVING INTO STAGE TWO

Once the leadership requirement is clear and aligned, the organization is ready to find the person who can meet it — and help them succeed once appointed.

STAGE TWO

02 Appoint

Find the right leader. Then help them succeed.

Once the leadership requirement is clear, the organization has to find someone who can meet it. But search is not simply about generating names.

It is a market conversation.

The strongest senior executives are often not looking for a job. They need a reason to engage. That means understanding not only who has the required experience, but why the opportunity might matter to them, what would make them move and whether the organization can offer the conditions in which they are likely to succeed.

The objective is not a shortlist

A long list of candidates does not necessarily create a better decision.

The objective should be:

A better understanding of the available choices, and ultimately a better leadership decision.

That requires disciplined market mapping, direct conversations, careful assessment and an understanding of the context surrounding each candidate. It also means being prepared to challenge assumptions when the market provides new information.

Selection is about context

A strong executive in one organization is not automatically the right executive for another.

Leadership effectiveness is shaped by context.

The ownership structure · The board · The culture · The team

The strategy · The market · The organization's appetite for change

The expectations of different stakeholders · The level of autonomy · The pressure surrounding the role

The question is therefore not simply: *Who is the strongest candidate?* It is: *Who is most likely to succeed in this environment, and what would need to be true for that success to happen?*

The appointment is the beginning

The accepted offer marks the end of the recruitment process. It should mark the beginning of the leadership relationship.

Senior executives joining a new organization need to understand more than their responsibilities.

They need to understand the unwritten rules.

- Who matters? How are decisions really made?
- Where are the sensitivities?
- What does the team need from them? What does the board expect?
- What needs to change quickly? What should not be changed too quickly?
- Where can they create early credibility?

The first 90 days matter

A strong onboarding process is not about giving a new executive more information.

It is about helping them turn information into understanding and understanding into action.

The first months should create clarity around:

- the business and strategic priorities
- stakeholders and relationships
- team dynamics and organizational culture
- expectations and measures of success
- early opportunities
- potential risks and blind spots

OUR VIEW

We do not see the appointment as the end of the search. We see it as the beginning of the leadership relationship.

03

STAGE THREE Develop

Turning leadership potential into performance

Once the executive is in the seat, the question changes. The organization no longer needs to know whether it can appoint someone. It needs to help that person and the leadership team perform.

Coaching is not remediation

Senior executives rarely need someone to tell them how to do their job.

They often need someone who can help them examine how they are doing it.

01

Where are they most effective? Where might they have blind spots?

02

How are they experienced by others?

03

What behaviors need to change as the role becomes more complex?

04

What assumptions are helping them? Which ones may now be limiting them?

Good executive coaching creates space for these questions and turns insight into action.

A bigger role requires a different leader

A promotion is not simply the same job with a bigger title. The transition from property leadership to corporate leadership, from functional leadership to enterprise leadership, or from executive to board-level responsibility often requires a change in identity as well as capability.

The behaviors that created success in one role may not be the behaviors required in the next. Leaders need to move from doing to enabling. From being the expert to creating the conditions for others to perform. From solving every problem to deciding which problems deserve their attention.

Development is therefore not only about acquiring new skills.

It is about becoming the leader the next stage of the business requires.

Leadership is relational

Senior leadership rarely happens in isolation. An executive can be highly capable and still struggle if relationships with the board, peers, team or key stakeholders are not working.

This is particularly relevant in hospitality, where leadership is experienced directly through people, service, operations and culture.

Understanding how leadership is perceived by others can therefore be as important as understanding how the leader sees themselves.

Teams matter

An executive team can contain highly capable individuals and still perform poorly as a team. Different priorities, personalities, incentives, cultural backgrounds and leadership styles can create friction or slow decision-making.

Team development is therefore not simply about improving relationships. It is about creating the conditions for better collective decisions and execution.

Development should inform succession

The information gathered during the appointment should not disappear when the offer is signed. Assessment insights, performance observations and development priorities can inform future succession decisions.

Development and succession are therefore connected.



Who is ready for the next step? Who needs more experience?



Where is additional support required?



Which capabilities will the organization need in the future?

04

STAGE FOUR

Transition

When one leadership chapter ends

Every leadership relationship eventually changes. An executive may leave following a sale, restructuring or change in ownership. A successful leader may decide it is time for something different. A role may no longer provide the challenge it once did. Or the organization may simply need a different leadership profile for its next phase.

Executive transition is more than a job search

For senior executives, a transition can challenge much more than employment.

It can affect professional identity, confidence, direction, relationships and the way an individual sees their own experience.

The question is not simply: *What role can I get next?* It may be: *What should the next chapter be?*

That requires an honest assessment of experience, strengths, motivations and ambitions.

It may lead to:

Another executive role

A move to another region

A board position

A portfolio career

Advisory work

Or a completely different direction

Reinvention does not mean starting again

Senior executives often underestimate the value of what they already know. Years of operating experience, market knowledge, relationships, leadership experience and judgement do not disappear when a job ends.

The challenge is often to translate that experience into a new context.

Reinvention should not be an exercise in starting again. It can be an exercise in reframing what you already know and can contribute.

The end is also a leadership moment

For organizations, transition is part of responsible leadership. For executives, it can be a moment to step back and make a more deliberate decision about what comes next.

The end of a leadership relationship is itself a leadership moment.

And when one chapter ends, the lifecycle begins again.



SAME LIFECYCLE, FOUR SEATS AT THE TABLE

Four perspectives on the same lifecycle

Leadership decisions look different depending on where you sit.

OWNER · BOARD

Are we making the leadership decisions the business needs?

- Are our critical leadership roles future-ready?
- Are we aligned on what we need from our leaders?
- Are we challenging our assumptions about talent?
- Do we understand our succession risks?
- Are we creating the conditions for leaders to succeed?

CEO · C-SUITE

Do we have the leadership capability to deliver the strategy?

- Do we have the right leaders in the right roles?
- Where are the capability gaps?
- Which leaders are ready for greater responsibility?
- Where does the leadership team need to develop?
- What leadership will the next phase of the business require?

HR · TALENT

Are our leadership processes connected?

- Is succession connected to development?
- Is assessment informing more than selection?
- Is onboarding connected to performance?
- Are we identifying leadership risks early?
- Are we helping executives navigate transitions effectively?

EXECUTIVE · VP

How do I succeed in this role, continue to grow and decide what comes next?

- What does success really look like here?
- How do I build credibility quickly?
- What do I need to change as my role evolves?
- How am I experienced by the people around me?
- What do I want my next leadership chapter to look like?

THE GOAL

The goal is not more activity. It is better decisions between the activities.

The questions are simple. The answers rarely are.

CONNECTING THE MOMENTS

The Leadership Lifecycle Perspective

Leadership decisions become clearer when the different parts of the life cycle are connected. We look at seven perspectives:

01

Market

What is happening in the leadership market? What talent does exist? What is changing? What is realistic?

02

Role

What does the business actually need? What is the leadership challenge behind the job description?

03

Person

Who has the capability and potential to succeed? What does the evidence tell us beyond experience and interview performance?

04

Organization

What environment will that person be leading in? What is the culture, stakeholders, ownership, team and expectations?

05

Performance

What happens once they take the seat? What will enable the leader to translate capability into results?

06

Development

What do the leader and team need to become more effective? Where should capability, behavior or leadership effectiveness evolve?

07

Next Decision

What will the organization and executive need next? What changes when the business, leader or leadership requirement changes?

The important point is not the seven perspectives individually. It is the connection between them.

Then the cycle begins again.

ONE CYCLE. MULTIPLE POINTS OF EXPERTISE. ONE GLOBAL PLATFORM.

Why Cornerstone

Leadership decisions rarely fit neatly into one service category.

A board may begin with a succession question and discover that the role itself needs to be redefined. A search may identify a strong candidate whose assessment reveals a specific development priority. A newly appointed executive may need support navigating the first year. A high-performing leader may reach a point where the next question is no longer about performance, but direction.

These are not unrelated events.

They are connected moments in the leadership lifecycle.

That is why Cornerstone brings together:

01	Executive Search	Finding and appointing senior leaders.
02	Executive Assessment	Understanding leadership capability, behavior, motivation and potential risk.
03	Executive Coaching	Helping leaders and teams translate capability into sustained performance.
04	Career & Transition Coaching	Helping senior executives navigate role changes, career decisions and their next chapter.
05	Leadership Development	Building the leadership capability organizations need for what comes next.

The value is in connecting those moments.

Market + Role**Executive Search**

Understanding what the organization needs and what the market can provide.

Person**Assessment**

Understanding whether an individual's capabilities, motivations and behaviors align with the demands of the role.

Organization + Performance**Coaching & Leadership Development**

Helping leaders and teams translate potential into performance.

Next Decision**Career & Transition Coaching**

Helping executives navigate the next leadership chapter when their role, organization or ambitions change.

Global reach. Local understanding. Sector expertise.

Cornerstone International Group brings together more than 60 offices across 40 countries, combining international reach with local market knowledge.

For hospitality, that matters.

Leadership markets are global, but leadership decisions are contextual.

A candidate's experience may have been gained in one market, the role may be based in another, and the expectations of owners, boards, employees and guests may be shaped by a completely different environment.

Global reach tells you where to look. Local understanding helps you understand what you find.

Our Hospitality, Travel & Leisure practice brings that global platform together with sector specialization. We work with owners, boards, hospitality companies and senior executives across the leadership lifecycle.

60+

OFFICES WORLDWIDE

40

COUNTRIES

1HOSPITALITY, TRAVEL &
LEISURE PRACTICE

A PERSPECTIVE SHAPED BY BOTH SIDES OF THE TABLE

About Florian Kittler



Florian Kittler combines more than three decades of hospitality and executive recruitment experience with international leadership advisory and coaching.

He spent nine years with HVS Executive Search, where he led the executive search business across Europe and Asia-Pacific, following an earlier career in senior hospitality leadership across Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

Today, Florian leads Cornerstone International Group's global Hospitality, Travel & Leisure practice, advising owners, boards, companies and senior executives on leadership and career decisions. His work spans executive search, assessment, executive coaching, career transition and leadership development.

ICF ACC

EMCC EIA

EXECUTIVE & CAREER COACHING

ASSESSMENT

NLP

AI LEADERSHIP & CONSULTING

I have spent my career looking at leadership from both sides of the table.

As a hospitality operator, I experienced the reality of leading people and delivering results. In executive search, I saw how owners, boards and organizations make decisions about senior leaders and how the market responds. Through executive and career coaching, I work with leaders on what happens after the appointment: performance, identity, development, transition and career direction.

That combination has changed how I think about leadership.

A leadership appointment is not an abstract exercise in matching a CV to a job description.

Someone has to deliver the numbers, lead the team, navigate the owners, manage the culture and make decisions under pressure.

And when the context changes, the leadership requirement changes with it.

That is what sits behind the hiring cycle approach.

BRINGING IT TOGETHER

The cycle begins again

A leadership appointment is not a single decision. It is a sequence.

- What does the business need?
- Who can deliver it?
- What evidence do we have?
- What will help the leader succeed?
- How does the leader need to develop?
- What happens when the leadership requirement changes?
- And what comes next?

Looking at these questions separately can produce fragmented decisions.

Looking at them as a lifecycle creates a different perspective.

For organizations, it means thinking
beyond the vacancy.

For executives, it means thinking
beyond the next job.

For both, it means recognizing that leadership is not a point in time.

It is a cycle.

CORNERSTONE HOSPITALITY

The appointment matters. What happens before and after it matters too.

We help hospitality organizations make better leadership decisions —
and help senior hospitality executives make better career decisions.

If you are facing a leadership decision, succession question, executive
transition or career crossroads, we welcome a confidential
conversation.

EXECUTIVE SEARCH

EXECUTIVE ASSESSMENT

EXECUTIVE COACHING

CAREER & TRANSITION COACHING

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT

READY TO TALK IT THROUGH?

BOOK A CONFIDENTIAL CONVERSATION

Florian Kittler

MANAGING PARTNER & GLOBAL SECTOR HEAD
HOSPITALITY, TRAVEL & LEISURE

Cornerstone International Group

cornerstone-hospitality.global

+49 173 88 69619

[linkedin.com/in/hospitality-executive-search](https://www.linkedin.com/in/hospitality-executive-search)

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