

Executive 2.0

Photo: Andrew SvK

How to sum up your executive brand story

Imagine this situation: You've made it to the final stages in the race to a new executive role. The most senior people in the firm tell you that you're a great candidate for the role, they want to offer you the job, but they have an issue. They have a second candidate who is equally good.

Why should they choose you? And what can you do to make sure they do? This is where you need to be able to come with a different story than the line-up of your resume. You need to frame your executive brand story clearly and concisely. I call this "the executive story".

Together with a few young consultants from a leading global firm, I developed a five-element structure to help my clients pitch their executive story and make it clear that they, and they alone, are the right candidate for the job.

Executive story summary – slides build up

Experience

Differentiators – what makes you unique?

Case studies

The "brand promise" – your ambition

Reason to believe – endorsement / framing



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1. your experience

I always start with a slide that acts as a one-page resume. It's not easy to convey the essence of a 20-year career in a one-pager, but that's part of showing you are capable of concisely summarising the complex — something that will give your audience confidence you're a CEO who can deliver a succinct business summary.

To use my own career as an example, in the left-hand column I display a timeline of my experience as an international executive. On the right, I list special elements from each role that I will then expand upon.

What's important is communicating a clear message of where you come from and who you are. In my case, I try to clearly share the message that I am an European experienced consumer goods and retail executive. A clear and transparent message acts as an anchor for the audience.

You need to capture what kind of leader you are. I summarise my specific capabilities, experience and leadership style on one slide using five key headings that reflect who I am and are important in my work as an executive searcher: international, innovator, team builder, talent focus, consultant. Use your slides to create a direct impression.

Feel free to change the format, but make sure the purpose remains the same — be clear about your experience and leadership style.

2. Differentiators — what makes you unique?

During interviews for an executive top position people want to learn about you as a leader. One of my most admired CHRO's described very well what he recognises in great leaders. He wants to meet leaders who are capable in : Setting direction, setting priorities, delegating to others, motivating and inspiring, decision making, continuous learning and self-reflection.

Then set yourself apart as a leader by demonstrating you are prepared for leadership scenarios you might meet in your next role. Consider subjects where leadership is necessary — like corporate strategy, change management or brand building — and make sure you are versed in a narrative that shows how you could successfully lead on each.



3. Case studies

Building case studies will draw on your unique experience and help you structure your story. Each new CEO or board member will be recruited to solve challenges. From your list of subjects, prepare three or four situations as case studies, such as cultural change, restructuring, or P&L if the company needs a leader who can transform loss into growth. Be pre-emptive — try to find out the specific leadership challenges the hiring business has on its agenda — and use your case studies to demonstrate your skills in resolving those issues.

The structure of all your case studies have a similar pattern: the situation, the problem, the analysis (generating insights), the strategy and operational roll out, followed by the results.

Case studies should be used as a planning method as much as a presentation tool. In fact, people often don't present the slide at all because the process of creating it has allowed them to verbalise the ideas without a prop. If you do use case study slides at the table, don't send them out and use them only to guide your audience through your story.

4. Brand promise — your ambition

Build your executive brand in the same way you build a physical brand. Use the '4 Ps' — pricing, product, packaging and promotion — but translate it to an executive level and sum it up with your personal aim.

In my case, the summary is 'The Trusted Advisor'. My aim is to deliver more value than the agent who transfers executives from A to B. It's my ambition to grow into a trusted advisor relationship with my clients and be considered for a range of leadership questions going further than only helping with executive search assignments.

Your audience wants a leader who matches the core values of the company, so work out a balanced story about your ambition as leader and a clear explanation what kind of leader you will be in your next role. Try to touch subjects like your own purpose in life and work, your personal values and your expertise and leadership capabilities.



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I encourage candidates to use a word cloud to refine a description of their value and who they are. Don't include it in your presentation but use it as a tool to generate vocabulary that fits your executive brand and better equips you to articulate who you are when you frame your story.

Executive word cloud



Reasons to believe — endorsement / framing

Create a slide that maps your industry expertise. You need to guide your audience to the sectors that are your best fit and which you are aiming for. I choose to present brands, but you may focus on industries, business sizes or geographical scope. You can also decide to create a slide that demonstrates where your experience and personal competencies match with the requirements in a search job profile.

Think of it like this — if you build a new road without lights, people will drive in all kinds of directions. But when you include lights and lines and signage, people follow the right direction. The same applies for your next career step. You can guide people to call and consider you for the right fitting jobs, because you have "framed their thinking".

Decide where and who you aspire to work with and have confidence in your choice. If a client wants me to help with a search assignment in banking or law, I will introduce them to a colleague who is an expert in that field. Likewise, by being honest about my own expertise, I am sending a strong message that people in my industries should choose me.

You may only formally present these slides on certain occasions, but in preparing them you will define your executive brand story. And once you're face to face with your audience, you can lift the discussion to a level beyond your resume. Never sent the slides around, people will not understand them without your personal passionate explanation.

Ready to secure your next executive role? Get in touch [<link to contact>](#) with me to start refining your brand story — and bring your way forward into focus.

Eelco van Eijck
Managing Partner Amrop

✉ Eelco.van.eijck@amrop.nl

☎ +31 20 347 3240

🌐 www.amrop.nl



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