One of the most important responsibilities of a university president is to appoint talented senior leaders. In my first 18 months at California State University, Fresno, I have had the opportunity to appoint three vice presidents, a chief of staff, and a Division I athletic director.

I learned a great deal from this experience. Here are some insights that may be useful to you.

**Raise the bar.** Set high standards. It is imperative that you find the person you believe is best equipped to assume leadership at this unique time. While there may be time, market or other pressures that exist, do not yield to them if they compromise your ability to find the right person.

**Model transparency.** Be clear about what you want. It is imperative to be transparent about skill sets that are particularly important to you. For example, you may believe that the position needs a fresh perspective possessed only by someone from outside of the campus or academy. Share your views with the search firm, search committee, and the community and transparently build consensus for the right type of candidate.

**Retain a search firm.** Search firms are your allies. I retained an outside firm to assist with all but one of the searches. The firm was chosen based on a track record of success in helping other universities identify talented people for a comparable position. The primary benefit was a pool of talented and diverse candidates who would not have responded to an advertisement. This benefit more than outweighed the financial investment to retain a firm.

**Engage the campus and community.** Your decision will be enhanced through authentic engagement of the campus and community. In our three vice president searches, we invited students, faculty, staff, alumni and friends to hear a presentation by the final candidates. Attendees were invited to complete a confidential assessment, which was shared with the search committee and me. I read each evaluation and considered these perspectives before making a selection. The evaluations sharpened my assessment of and reaffirmed my instincts about the candidates.

**Listen to your search committee.** The search committee should be trusted to identify and review candidates on your behalf. My charge to such committees is: “Provide me with three to five unranked candidates who are acceptable to serve in the position.” When the committees had their final deliberations about which candidates to forward to me, I joined them to listen. By doing this, I was able to hear and understand nuances of their analysis, especially if a difference of opinion existed among members.

**Focus on the future.** Hopefully, you will search to replace someone who has been successful. This may lead some colleagues to advocate for the new senior leader to have an identical skill set as the predecessor. This is a mistake. Our institutions are operating in a rapidly changing environment and you want to select someone who will succeed over the next decade, which likely means he or she will need a different skill set.

**Value emotional intelligence.** Ideally, you will have the opportunity to select from among candidates who have strong technical skills. While skill and a track record of significant accomplishments are necessary, they alone are insufficient. You will want to select someone who has demonstrated a high level of emotional intelligence throughout her or his career. The ability to effectively deal with ambiguity, remain calm under pressure, and thrive on a campus with diverse colleagues and perspectives is vitally important.

I hope these insights are helpful to you. Please share your thoughts with me at josephcastro@csufresno.edu or via Twitter at @josephicastro.

---

Joseph I. Castro is president of California State University, Fresno.