

# CEO UPDATE

THE SOURCE FOR ASSOCIATION NEWS AND EXECUTIVE CAREERS

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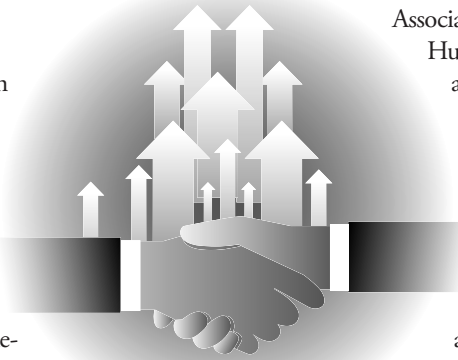
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## Art of the deal: Groups active with mergers, partnerships

*Trade and professional associations find revenue, ways to further mission with moves in networking, meetings, membership and tech*

By William Ehart

Associations have been playing Let's Make a Deal in recent years, entering into partnerships and making acquisitions to broaden their reach. They are pursuing new markets—and sometimes profits—diversifying audiences and elevating members and stakeholders, all within the context of fulfilling their mission.



The American Hotel & Lodging Association, the Society for Human Resource Management and PCMA (Professional Convention Management Association) have acquired organizations in recent years that promote networking and professional development, in some cases among underrepresented communities. AHLA entered a partnership to create a new trade

show. PCMA has purchased a related association in the U.K., and the Society of Plastics Engineers bought a for-profit French company.

“Our purpose is to elevate HR,” SHRM CEO Johnny C. Taylor Jr. told CEO Update. “(To do that), you have to have third-party validators and evangelists and ambassadors for your work. ... I can say HR matters all day, and you can be practicing some damn good HR, but if your CEO doesn't understand what great looks like and why it's valuable to him or her, it's all for naught.”

To that end, SHRM has acquired two

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## Panelists share perspectives on careers, diversity

*Recruiters talk at CEO Update LIVE*

By William Ehart

Tips on landing executive jobs and frustration with the pace of increasing diversity in association C-suites were hot topics at the CEO Update LIVE Executive Recruiting forum Feb. 22.

“Search committees have always wanted candidates to be their authentic selves,” said longtime executive recruiter Jim Zaniello, president of Vetted Solutions. “But they're digging

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# Panelists share perspectives on careers, diversity

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much more deeply into, “Why do you want this role? Why are you interested? What in your background aligns with who we are as people, whether that’s small business owners or large tech companies. What’s your passion to serve us and to help us advance our mission?”

Jami Armstrong, of Impact Search Advisors by Nonprofit HR, also said connection to mission is critical for landing and succeeding at executive jobs.

“It’s important for candidates to pursue opportunities in this mission, social-impact space that they can genuinely get behind as opposed to missions that they can learn just because there’s an opportunity for them.

“If you are really connected to the mission and the cause of the organization, that’ll be evident in your interactions and just naturally seep into the culture of the organization, and it will bring an organic commonality when you’re interacting with your staff.”

The other three panelists were Julian Ha, leader of the association recruiting practice at Heidrick & Struggles, Jeffrey Tenenbaum, nonprofit attorney at Tenenbaum Law Group and Stephanie Tomasso, head of association recruiting at Russell Reynolds Associates. Columbia Books & Information Services CEO Brittany Carter moderated the gathering held at the headquarters of the National Association of Home Builders in downtown Washington, D.C. CBIS acquired CEO Update last year.

Panelists expressed concerns about the pace of hiring diverse association executive candidates—and so did some attendees.

Ha said not enough is being done to fill the pipeline of diverse talent, and that qualified minority candidates are sometimes at a disadvantage to more experienced ones. He said some hiring organizations are suffering from “diversity fatigue,” feeling they’ve already done enough and now must focus on other concerns, like economic uncertainty.

“Unless you have next-generation (executives who) are being internally groomed and promoted, and are visible, they’re up against candidates who are already in that role,” Ha said. “Most clients are going to go with someone who’s tried and tested.”

Tenenbaum said he’s seen an increase in hiring association executives from diverse backgrounds,

but it’s not enough. He noted that a hallmark of great leadership is preparing staff for the next step in their careers.

“Really successful executives do a great job of mentoring and training and coaching and getting external coaching support for their particularly senior staff,” he said.

## Exodus of diverse executives

Frustration was palpable in some of the questions and comments from the audience. Tamela Blalock, who is Black, said she and other association executives feel “Rooney rule exhaustion.” The National Football League policy requires teams to interview diverse candidates for head coaching and senior operations positions.

Blalock, vice president of corporate relations at the National Cooperative Business Association CLUSA International, said too many qualified people of diverse backgrounds are not getting association jobs they interview for. As a result, she is seeing an “exodus” of talent from the sector.

“It feels like organizations

are being performative and not genuine about wanting the best talent represented in the trade association industry,” she said.

Tomasso said the composition of a search committee is a clue about how committed the organization is to diversity.

“We also have an obligation to be counselors to the clients that we work with,” she said. “It’s alarming when I go into a search committee conversation with a group of all white men and they tell me how important a diverse candidate is going to be.

“And I say, ‘That’s great, but what is your organization doing to promote diversity and inclusion? And how is the candidate going to resonate to this group? Is there diversity within the organization? Could you not find a woman or a person of color to join the discussion?’

“I’ve said that, and sometimes I lose. And that’s fine, because if that’s the way that they feel, then perhaps I’m not the right person to help them conduct the search,” Tomasso said.



Left to right: Jeff Tenenbaum, Jami Armstrong and Jim Zaniello



Left to right: Brittany Carter, Julian Ha and Stephanie Tomasso



CEO Update LIVE was held in-person at the National Association of Home Builders Feb. 22.



### 'Pro tips' for job search success

**Ask questions:** "This still happens, and it kills me," said Ha. "When the committee asks the candidate if they have any questions, there's always one person who says, 'No, I'm good.' And I'm like, 'No, you have to have a question and you have to have a question that is insightful because it shows you've done the work.'"

**Be inclusive:** "One of the things that I'm always asking candidates about is, 'What are you doing to foster inclusivity once you get (diverse employees) in the door?'" said Tomasso. "Because if the culture of the organization is not going to foster a team that wants to be there and can be their true selves at work, then it's going to fail."

**Be concise:** "Try to parse your words, to have pithy answers," Tomasso said. "Respond quickly as opposed to droning on and on. One of the hazards for candidates is if in the brief intro of your background, three to five minutes turns into 25."

**Impact culture:** "One of the areas we all dig into very deeply is, what was candidates' impact on culture, good or bad?" Ha said. "Thinking about who can be a good reference about your impact on culture is going to make a difference."

### What will colleagues say about you?:

Recruiters on the panel agreed that part of their job is interviewing colleagues who were not among your references. In fact, sometimes search committee members themselves reach out to such people, Ha said.

"It's rare a search committee will let us get away with, 'Here are the references the candidates gave us,'" Zaniello said. "They want to know who we talked to who weren't on the candidates' provided reference list, and who we meaningfully spoke to, for more objective data on the candidate."

**Treat others well:** "Here's a pro tip," Ha said. "(I want to know) how the candidates interacted with and treated our team. I ask my front office coordinator, 'How did that candidate comport themselves when you were scheduling them? If they treat us in a certain way, but other people in a different way, that's important (to know).'"

### Employment contracts and more

Other topics included trends in executive contracts and the challenges of interviewing with associations when you haven't represented their industry or profession before.

Tenenbaum said CEO contracts today are emphasizing compensation and bonuses based on performance, while traditional perks are fading: "I'm just seeing more focus on the money."

Exceptions include flying business class on longer flights and funds for executive coaching.

Increasingly, associations want to keep tabs on their chief executive's health, he said.

"I'm seeing things like the executive gets an annual executive physical a lot more than I have in the past," Tenenbaum said.

Armstrong said that with increased economic uncertainty, candidates are scrutinizing termination provisions. "They want to secure, early in the engagement, severance packages that will protect them in a volatile employment market."

In response to a question from the audience, Zaniello said associations increasingly prefer hiring executives from associations in similar industries and fields.

"More boards and search committees today want someone from a related association," he said. "Someone who already knows the industry or profession at some level."

Armstrong said the key is to "be able to artfully articulate your transferrable skills." ■

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