

Debunking 5 Myths About Interim Executives

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An interim executive can be an ideal hiring solution when strong and steady leadership is needed, however they are often misunderstood and overlooked. [Charlene Bergman](#) seeks to debunk five common myths about interim executives and proves why these skilled executives could be exactly what your talent strategy needs.

As a disrupted workforce becomes the norm, the interim executive is a growing—and often misunderstood—hiring solution for change, transformation, or to fill leadership gaps. However, Canadian hiring managers, talent acquisition teams and human resource leaders are often playing catch-up when it comes to realizing an interim executive's potential. They often aren't as familiar with interim hiring practices as their counterparts in the [UK and Europe](#) where, in the early 70s, restrictive legislation around termination forced the creation of interim hiring practices.

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In Canada, interim search firms and interim executives, who are actively promoting leadership solutions, recognize there are misconceptions around interim leaders—who they are, where they are at in their careers, and the valuable contributions they can make.

Here, we debunk five myths about interim executives—lifting the veil and shedding some light on what interims can do for your organization.

1. Interim executives use approaches that are antiquated and out-of-date

On average, the age span of interim executives ranges from mid-50's to early 60's. These leaders have lived through the greatest technological changes, innovative business models, and strategies—starting in the weeds and working their way up through their careers. Bringing an average of 15-20 years of experience, interims strive to stay relevant and keep a finger on the pulse of the latest trends. In fact, their successful past is what brings them to the world of interim leadership. They still have a passion for their work, are reluctant to fully retire, and their networks continue to tap them for their expertise.

An accomplished interim executive in the tech sector once said to me “I don’t know how to build system components using Amazon Lamda functions, but us experienced types know how to hire developers and teams that can...and we help prevent the mistakes that the younger managers have not yet experienced. I think that mentoring is where we make a big difference.”

2. Interim executives are the same as consultants—they hand off work to be executed by full-time executives

There is a popular saying among interim circles “Consultants hand off the work and interims make it happen.” Unlike consultants, who are advisors, interim executives do not hand off work. Rather, they join forces with the teams they are hired to support and lead. Interims become a part of strategic plans taking full responsibility for the mandates they are hired to fill including execution, roll out, and implementation. It’s important to note that some interims complement consultants and carry their batons forward, leading execution from where a consultant left off.

3. Interim leaders are outsiders

Interim executives integrate seamlessly with the teams they are hired to support, just like full-time employees. They participate in company meetings, round tables, town halls and the like; often establishing themselves as mentors, thought leaders, culture carriers, and confidants to employees at all levels of the organization.

4. Interim Executives are hard to find

The ability to quickly tap into interim talent communities takes years of building relationships with thought leaders and knowing many of them while they were working full-time or transitioning between engagements. Having cultivated these relationships and vast professional networks—that include internal and external sources—recruiters that specialize in interim search are tapped into the world of [passive talent](#) and wired for fast turnaround, often in less than a week.

5. Interim Executives are only available for short-term contracts

Interim professionals are sourced from two candidate pools, executives in transition who take interim roles in between full-time assignments and interim executives who hang shingles as executives-for-hire. Interim search firms will always qualify executives before shortlisting to determine their long-term availability and interests. While it's true that many interims prefer three-to-six-month assignments, many engage their clients for renewable contracts that continue beyond 12 months and will often, accept full-time positions when offered. In fact, 70% of our interim assignments have become full-time.

Today's organizational structures are built on entirely new approaches to work and leadership, where tactics to drive change and transformation are often destabilizing, unpredictable and ongoing.

Interim leaders have weathered many storms and can come into executive teams with a calming influence. By leaning on decades of successfully managing through chaos and leading through flux, their ability to pivot quickly, and with confidence, can be exactly what the workplaces of today need to adapt and respond successfully.

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Our Contributors

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