



Executive Search Case Study - 2012

Assignment: Costa Coffee China Food Product Director

Client Company: Costa Coffee

The Challenge:

- Costa Coffee was newly launching into China market and expanding rapidly.
- Following repeated and unsuccessful attempts to find a suitable person since 2009, in 2011 Fitco as a boutique retained search firm was selected to bring on board a Food Product Manager to develop the quality and range of food offerings across China and beyond where we are expanding rapidly.
- Costa Coffee needs a candidate who is familiar with chain store operations, commercially aware and savvy, yet still at the same time make sure that the quality of the food meets the international standards and demonstrate the quality consistency of the brand.
- The company tried with contingency search for 3 years and failed to find this person in China as an emerging market at that time.
- Costa's ideal candidate profile required a strategic and hands-on person to manage food suppliers, distributors and coffee shops and a creative talent that could bring an appropriate blend of China and Western cultural inputs to the food range.
- The person was also required to be a fluent Mandarin and English speaker with relevant China and Western business experience.
- Most important was the requirement to fit into Costa Asia's focused, ambitious and professional culture and highly pressurised working environment where harmonious teamwork is essential.

Solution:

As China as an emerging market, the required talents are not ready yet, there were few talents in China however the title and salary was inflated. Fitco's solution is to launch a search to a more mature market, for example, Singapore, HongKong, Taiwan, candidates who have international exposure, culturally close to China culture and from commercially competitive market. And the candidate will have the transferrable skill and process to apply to a new emerging market.

After diligent search, Fitco worked from long list of candidates to shortlist of candidates, finally, an ideal candidate is hired:

- Close to 13 years experience with leading beverage refreshment companies throughout Singapore.
- More than 10 years managerial experience ranging from store to territory management roles
- Outstanding record in Starbucks leading to store manager role in flagship Singapore store
- Learnt food development standards of the highest quality in managerial role in PS café serving up market ex-pat Singapore community
- Proven track record of successful leadership and management within the industry having been the Nr2 person in TCC from its inception to the current time employing more than 450 people
- Sourcing, selection and review of key suppliers
- Highly experienced in developing brand awareness for TCC
- Expert in understanding customer needs and wants through market research
- Traveled to Beijing in April 2011 2 weeks for Coffee Brand research so has developed good awareness of China competitive situation

Over all, Steven is a commercially aware leader with excellent experience in the up market coffee shop market in Singapore and can drive the growth in China. Has been the No. 2 person reporting to the owner of the chain from its inception 7 years ago and has driven the execution of the company's growth during this entire period and most recently developed a new brand. TCC has a range of foods that is of the highest quality and variety and this reflects well on Steve's commitment to creativity and quality.

Hiring for Success! Comments from Asia CEO of Costa Coffee, Mr. Paul Smith:

Fitco were able to professionally present 3 excellent candidates based in both Singapore and China that were currently delivering high quality food solutions for other leading food service brands. Key competencies and talent were matched resulting in all requiring interviews. The candidate we selected had an excellent track record and possessed the ideal qualities we were seeking, and after a year in the role he has, and continues to have a significant impact on our business and is highly regarded by the rest of the Costa management team. We chose Fitco for several good reasons including a considered and thorough approach to understanding the brief, skilled questioning and business principles such as a shared culture of concern for ecology and the environment.

In conclusion, I have no hesitation in endorsing the ability of Fitco to find and persuade the best people in an industry sector once a professional assignment is given to them to secure top talent.