



## How to Train Your Candidates Like Football Pros

**Recruiter:** Carole Tomko  
**Title:** Executive vice president and partner  
**Firm:** The Woodmansee Group, Columbus, Ohio  
**Years as a Recruiter:** Six years

By Sharon L. Florentine

Executive recruiter Carole Tomko and her team have developed a unique recruiting tactic lifted from the pages of sports agents, college football recruiters and NFL scouts.

The Woodmansee Group, an executive search firm headquartered in Columbus, Ohio, uses what it calls the "external-benching" process to identify and develop potential candidates and keep them engaged for months or even years, until a client has an open position, said Tomko, a partner and executive vice president at TWG.

"It's analogous to, say, how the NFL scouts talent from colleges with major football programs," she said. "These scouts identify talent well in advance, when the players are freshman and sophomores, and work on developing their potential and engaging the interest of their recruits. That's what we do."

"If, for example, a client knows that a high-level manager or executive will retire in a few months or years, they want to have a replacement fully vetted, prepped and ready to take over, but they don't have the budget to maintain a full roster [of backup executives,]" Tomko explained.

TWG identifies and engages potential successors for such positions and maintains ongoing relationships with those candidates until the client is ready to hire, she said. It's a process that can take months or even years, but the end result is an eager, skilled candidate who is knowledgeable about the client and can ramp up easily once they're taken "off the bench" and placed in the new position.

This approach not only is more cost effective for clients, but also drastically reduces the amount of time it takes to find, investigate and hire potential employees.

"It makes the process so much faster when the candidates are waiting in the wings," Tomko said. "We already know their skills are a fit, and that culturally and socially they'll be a good match, so we can move within about two weeks instead of the usual four to six months it would take to find and place a 'cold' candidate."

It's not as difficult as it may seem to keep potential candidates engaged, but the technique works best for leading, name-brand clients, where the candidates are already interested in the positions and willing to keep the lines of communication open in anticipation of a shot at the open position.

"These are companies that candidates are very, very eager to work for — it's the huge brand names that everyone knows. Who wouldn't want jobs there?" she said.

Sure, she added, occasionally candidates fall off the bench because of changes in their lives — a family illness, a career change or a preference not to relocate. But for the most part, she said, candidates stay happily on the bench, contributing to their current position and waiting to be called up.

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