



Banner Lane



Strategic Leadership Transformation at a Leading Unmanned Marine Systems Supplier

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Specialist Defence Headhunters
SC and DV Cleared Careers

Introduction

A UK-based leading supplier of Unmanned and Autonomous Marine Systems, this SME operates within a larger international maritime business segment. Specialising in the design, build, and operation of Autonomous Surface Vehicles (ASVs), the company needed to transition from prototype-focused operations to full-scale production. This transition necessitated the recruitment of key leadership roles, including a new Operations Director and a Technical Director, to drive the change.

Background

The company, an SME recently acquired by a large US corporate, was experiencing significant growth and a cultural transformation. With a diverse customer base and a growing order backlog, the company was poised to expand its production capabilities. The acquisition brought about enhanced reporting requirements and increased involvement from the US parent company, necessitating a shift in corporate processes and culture. The incumbent Operations leader's retirement and the need to strengthen the Senior Leadership Team created an opportunity to bring in fresh leadership to oversee this critical transition.

Challenges

The primary challenges were transforming the company from a prototype-focused operation into a business capable of delivering volume production and enhancing its technology roadmap. The new Operations Director needed to implement new systems and processes to improve operational efficiency. Meanwhile, the Technical Director had to define and deliver the company's technology strategy and lead the development and day-to-day management of the growing engineering function.

Solutions

Operations Director Recruitment

The search for a new Operations Director focused on finding a leader with experience in managing significant organizational changes and scaling operations. The ideal candidate needed to possess:

- Broad management and leadership knowledge.
- Strong understanding of operations management best practices.
- Experience with low volume complex builds and systems integration.
- Experience in leading teams through growth and transformation.

We conducted a nationwide headhunt targeting defence companies and aligned manufacturers of complex low-volume systems. The successful candidate was hired from a complex machine supplier with prior defence experience in early warning systems.

Technical Director Recruitment

The recruitment for the Technical Director aimed at securing a leader with a background in high-technology sectors and experience in delivering full-lifecycle projects. The candidate needed to have:

- Significant experience in both delivering full-lifecycle projects and exploiting intellectual property.
- Understanding of complex embedded systems engineering and integration.
- Relationships within the UK Defence industry.

The Technical Director would oversee a large engineering function of over 50 engineers, ranging from electrical and mechanical design to embedded software and Python developers. The search targeted defence companies and aligned manufacturers, leading to the hiring of a candidate from a background of small working groups within large defence contractors who had existing relationships with Navy Command and Dstl.

Recruitment Process

Throughout the recruitment process, we liaised closely with the local Managing Director and a US Business Unit Leader. This multistep process included onsite visits, interviews, and assessments to ensure the best fit for the roles.

Results

Operations Director Impact

The appointed Operations Director quickly formed positive relationships with colleagues and made an immediate impact on the organization. The introduction of new systems and processes led to improved operational efficiency and increased revenue. The new leader's collaborative and mentoring approach fostered a strong team culture, while their ability to be direct and firm, when necessary, ensured the implementation of necessary changes.

Technical Director Impact

The Technical Director successfully defined and implemented the company's technology strategy. They enhanced product maturity, delivery speed, quality, and efficiencies. Their leadership in developing the engineering and programme functions created a lasting legacy. Overseeing a team of over 50 engineers, the Technical Director managed functions ranging from electrical and mechanical design to embedded software and Python development. This individual was later promoted to Managing Director and continues to drive positive change, contributing to the company's ongoing growth and success.

Under the new leadership, the business grew by 300% approaching £30 million in the subsequent three years, with a diverse customer base and an order backlog of £40-50 million.

Our Team Involved



Stephen Start - Director



Thomas Byron - Consultant

Comments on these searches:

"This assignment presented unique challenges due to the critical importance of cultural fit. We needed to identify individuals with highly specific skill sets and experience in navigating the complex dynamics of scaling acquired companies while preserving their SME identity and satisfying a corporate acquirer. The success of our efforts is evident, as both recruited leaders remain in their positions, with one having been promoted to Managing Director."

Stephen Start - Director
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