

Key to executive sourcing in Africa during the pandemic

By [Bafana Kubheka](#)

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In South Africa, we use the term "ubuntu". It doesn't just apply to business but every aspect of life. It is a social contract based on the philosophy that if my community thrives, I thrive. Other African countries use different words to describe ubuntu, but the spirit is the same: I am because we are.



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Since it describes the uniquely African approach of embracing mutual prosperity, it inevitably also encompasses our way of doing business. We're in business for each other, and long-term relationships are favoured over making a "quick buck".

So it's no wonder that building rapport and strengthening bonds socially is a highlight of doing business in Africa. One must be prepared - and enjoy the occasion - to spend a good amount of time discussing personal matters, like one's family life, health, opinions, values or beliefs, before getting down to the deal.

For foreign companies, this may seem like a waste of time, a needless distraction or a lack of focus. Yet taking the opportunity to assess one another and cement a more personal working relationship ensures it will be lasting and fruitful. And able to weather the inevitable ups and downs of a sometimes disruptive business environment.

Against this background, we find ourselves in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. While the spirit of ubuntu continues in our communities, doing business the African way is severely hampered by lockdowns, restrictions on travel and social distancing. It's not easy to get to know someone and build trust if you can't even meet them in person.

Of course, these measures are essential to combating one of the greatest dangers the world has faced in recent history. However, they affect us both externally - in the supply chain - and internally - in the way we run our businesses. This is especially true when it comes to selecting new executives.

How do you assess the character and cultural fit of each new executive hire without the ability to meet them face-to-face? In these complex times, it pays to simplify the process by building a single strong relationship with a highly trusted partner that has the resources and expertise to find and appraise high quality executives on your behalf.

Their success will depend on their access to talent pools across the continent, so they can source leadership specialisations not available in your region. It will also depend on a deep understanding of the unique market environment in which you operate, as well as that of your trading partners. And, most importantly, their service will hinge on their inherent grasp of doing business the African way, in the spirit of mutual growth.

There is nothing we can do about Covid-19. It is here to stay, at least for the foreseeable future, and we must adapt to this new normal. But you don't have to sacrifice trust when hiring the executives your company will depend on for leadership in this challenging time. You just need the right executive search partner, who understands what you really want.

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