How Strong Leaders Decide What Not to Take On

One thing I've noticed over the years is that the best Regulatory and Quality leaders don't necessarily have fewer priorities than everyone else. If anything, they usually have more.

A submission is moving toward a deadline. An inspection is on the horizon. Commercial teams need answers. Product development keeps moving. Someone wants to launch a new system. Someone else thinks it's the right time to rewrite procedures or reorganize responsibilities.

Most of it makes sense. The problem is that it all arrives at the same time.

I was talking with a VP of Quality not long ago who walked me through everything on his team's plate. By the end of the conversation, I counted eight major initiatives. I asked him which one mattered most.

He laughed. "That's the problem," he said. "They're all important."

A week later we spoke again. He'd met with his leadership team and made a different decision. Instead of trying to move eight projects forward, they agreed to focus on three. The others weren't cancelled. They were simply pushed back until the work in front of them was finished.

His comment stuck with me. "I finally realized we weren't short on ideas. We were short on capacity."

I think that's a realization a lot of leaders eventually come to. I've seen organizations spend months trying to improve everything at once, only to find themselves making very little progress anywhere. Every project gets a little attention, but nothing actually crosses the finish line.

Then I see other companies make a different choice. They protect the work that's tied to the company's next milestone. Maybe that's getting a submission out the door. Maybe it's preparing for an inspection. Maybe it's supporting a product launch without creating unnecessary risk. Everything else waits. Not because it isn't valuable. Because right now it isn't the most important thing.

That isn't always an easy conversation. It sometimes means telling another department they'll have to wait. It sometimes means explaining to executive leadership why a worthwhile project needs to start next quarter instead of next week. Those conversations can be uncomfortable. But they're often what allows the team to deliver on the commitments that matter most.

One pattern I keep seeing is that organizations don't usually struggle because they have too few good ideas. They struggle because every good idea becomes an immediate priority. The leaders who consistently move their companies forward know the difference.

They aren't saying "no."

They're saying, "Not yet."

And in many cases, that's one of the most important leadership decisions they make.

Best wishes,
Jeff King, CPC
President | Talent Advisor, RQ Focus
Building Regulatory and Quality teams that perform when it counts

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What Successful Leaders Get Clear About First

I ask every client the same two questions at the start of a search. What are the priorities in the first six months? What needs to be true a year from now for this person to be considered a great hire?

The answers tell me almost everything about how the search is going to go.

One client gave me vague answers. When I pushed for specifics, the hiring manager told me, "Just send me some people you think are good. I'll know if it's a good fit when I see it." That search dragged on. It never got filled. The hiring manager didn't have a clear picture of the problem they were solving, which meant I didn't have a clear picture of what to screen for.

Another client answered the same questions with real specificity. They knew the pressing issues this person would tackle starting day one, and they knew exactly what success would look like at the one year mark. They knew the problem and the puzzle piece needed to solve it. That clarity gave me a sharp, well defined picture of who to look for. Within fifteen days I had four people submitted. Interviews were set up with three of them. An offer went out a few days later. The whole process took about three and a half weeks.

The clarity didn't stop at the search instructions. It carried straight into the interviews. Candidates who interviewed with the first client described the conversations as rambling and confusing. They walked away without a real sense of the role or the expectations. The strongest candidates dropped out. With the second client, candidates were impressed by the team, understood the expectations clearly, and could see the company's vision and mission. All three finalists wanted the role. The client hired someone they were genuinely excited about.

The first client never hired anyone, and given how the process went, wouldn't have had a real choice between strong candidates even if they had.

What strikes me about these two situations is that this wasn't really a story about interviewing technique. It was a story about clarity, and how clarity shows up everywhere once it exists. A hiring manager who knows exactly what they need makes better, faster decisions. Candidates can feel that clarity in the room, and it makes them want to join. A hiring manager who's still figuring it out as they go makes the search take longer, confuses the candidates who show up, and often loses the best ones before an offer is even on the table.

Getting clear doesn't mean having every answer. It means knowing the two or three things that actually matter before you start the search, and being able to say them out loud.

Best wishes,
Jeff King, CPC
President | Talent Advisor, RQ Focus

The Hidden Gap Between Great Talent and Great Companies

Over the past few months, I've had versions of the same conversation from two different sides. A company saying, "We just can't find the right person." And, separately, exactly the kind of person they're looking for. They never meet.

A QA and RA Director at a smaller company had been searching for a software QE for about four months. Most applicants were general software testers, capable of testing software in isolation but without experience testing it on the actual product to see how it operated there. That distinction mattered for what her team needed to accomplish.

At the same time, I was talking with a very experienced senior software QE who had done exactly that kind of work. They were ready to move, but too busy to scroll job postings and wanted opportunities brought to them. When I described this person to the Director, she said that was exactly who she'd been looking for. Then came the catch: the company didn't want to use an outside recruiter, and there was no budget for a fee. She'd already spent significant time reviewing applicants with no fit to show for it, while the projects sat stalled and her consultant's limited availability kept things from moving. The search itself had become a part time job she didn't want and didn't have time for. As far as I know, the role never got filled, and the senior QE never heard about it.

Good RA and QA people are out there. So are good roles. They keep missing each other because searches often stay limited to one channel, run by leaders already stretched thin. There's a second cost to this that rarely gets discussed: candidates who see the same posting month after month start to wonder if something's wrong with the company, or whether it's a ghost job. Over time, they stop taking those roles seriously, which makes the next hire even harder.

None of this means abandoning your own efforts. Internal postings, HR outreach, and referrals can all keep running in parallel. The real question is what it's costing you not to add one more resource to the mix, in the time spent on applicants who were never a fit, the money tied up in stalled projects and consultant hours, and the weeks or months a leader spends managing a search that isn't working. If I don't find you the right person, there's nothing to pay. If I do, the fee is worth it because the role gets filled, the work starts moving again, and the time and money that were leaking into a stalled search go back into the work your team was hired to do.

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When Leaders Start Wearing Too Many Hats

Over the past few years, I've seen the same pattern in different companies.

On a slide, it looks like "lean" and "efficient."

Up close, it looks like one or two people quietly carrying more hats than is sustainable until something gives.

One QA Director I spoke with had been at his company for four years.

About 110 people.

Very lean team.

He kept asking for approval to hire more, but the answer was always no.

He tried to promote people on his team to keep them engaged, and that was turned down too.

Meanwhile, the work kept coming.

He was working 12 to 14 hour days just to keep up.

From the outside, it was easy to say, “We’re getting a lot out of this team.”

From the inside, he was exhausted.

He finally quit and went to find a company with more reasonable expectations.

The original company?

They ended up bringing in three consultants to cover what he had been doing, just to protect the rest of the team from burning out in the same way.

It was an expensive way to learn that “one more year with the same structure” wasn’t actually cheaper.

Another version of this shows up with founders.

I think of one founder and CEO at a roughly 30 person medical device company.

He knew he needed a head of RA/QA.

He said it out loud more than once.

But in the meantime he was:

Running the company
Overseeing very expensive RA consultants, which meant several meetings and calls every week
Heading up clinical trials
Working on the next round of funding so they could grow into new markets

Every one of those hats felt important.

None of them felt optional.

Because his time was pulled in so many directions, submission deadlines slipped.

Product launches were delayed.

The next round of funding dragged on for almost a year longer than it needed to.

At one point, I suggested a different path.

A single person who would cost much less than the current setup and who would take ownership of RA, QA, and Clinical so he could focus on running the company.

It wasn't a magic fix.

But it would have taken several hats off his head and given the work a clear owner.

He didn't have the bandwidth to follow through.

A year later, he was still on the same hamster wheel.

Same hats.

Same pressure.

Same delays.

When leaders start wearing too many hats, important work doesn't stop getting done.

It just gets done later, under more stress, with less room for error.

The costs show up in ways that are easy to explain away:

A missed submission date
A delayed launch
A funding process that takes months longer than it needed to
A QA or RA leader who quietly burns out and walks away

If you recognize this mix of hats in your own situation, and they're starting to feel heavy, I'd be happy to talk through what I've seen work and what hasn't.

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What Good Actually Looks Like in RA/QA Hiring Right Now

Over the past few months, I've had conversations with Regulatory and Quality leaders preparing for submissions, getting ready for audits, building quality systems, and supporting commercialization efforts.

The work isn't slowing down.

If anything, many teams are being asked to accomplish more with fewer resources.

That's why hiring conversations have started to sound different than they did a few years ago.

Leaders aren't asking, "Can this person do the job?"

They're asking, "Can this person help us accomplish what we're trying to accomplish next?"

There's a big difference.

A company preparing for a critical submission doesn't necessarily need another set of hands.

They need someone who has seen similar situations before and can help keep the team moving when timelines shorten and priorities change.

A company preparing for an audit doesn't just need someone who understands quality systems.

They need someone who can identify issues before they become findings and help the organization stay focused on the work that matters most.

That's what good hiring looks like right now.

It’s less about filling seats and more about understanding the outcome the business is working toward.

The strongest leaders I’ve spoken with are very clear about that from the beginning.

They know what the company is trying to accomplish over the next 12 to 24 months.

They understand where the team is likely to feel pressure.

And they hire accordingly.

When that clarity exists, hiring becomes much more effective because the focus shifts from credentials and job descriptions to business impact.

The result isn’t just a stronger team.

It’s a team that’s better positioned to hit important milestones with fewer surprises along the way..

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