

When You Don't Need a Senior Hire (Yet)



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One of the assumptions I see companies make is that the next challenge automatically requires a more senior person. Sometimes it does. But not always.

I've had conversations with leaders who are convinced they need a VP, a Director, or someone with twenty years of experience because the business is growing. When we start talking through what they're actually trying to accomplish over the next six to twelve months, the picture often changes.

Often, the real need is getting specific work done, not adding another executive. Maybe it's preparing a 510(k). Maybe it's building out parts of the quality system. Maybe it's closing out design history files, supporting verification activities, or getting ready for an inspection. Those are important priorities, but they don't always require the most senior person available.

In fact, bringing in someone who's significantly more experienced than the role demands can create a different set of problems. Senior leaders are at their best when they're setting direction, making difficult decisions, mentoring others, and helping the company navigate what's coming next.

If most of their day is spent executing work that someone else could own, neither the individual nor the business gets the full value of that experience. I've seen companies hire a seasoned executive only to discover six months later that there wasn't enough strategic work to keep them engaged.

Meanwhile, the execution work that was creating the bottleneck still wasn't

moving any faster because there simply weren't enough people doing it. That's usually a sign that the organization solved the wrong problem. Before deciding what level of experience to add, I think it's worth asking a different question.

What's keeping the business from moving forward today?

Is it that no one knows what to do?

Or is it that the people who know exactly what to do simply don't have enough time to do it?

Those are very different situations. One calls for experience and leadership. The other calls for capacity. The strongest leaders I've worked with spend time understanding where the real constraint is before making a decision.

Sometimes the answer is a senior hire who can build the function, establish priorities, and guide the company through the next stage of growth. Other times, the organization already has that leadership. What it needs is someone who can take ownership of the work that's piling up so the senior team can focus only on the decisions they can make.

That's often what keeps submissions on track, quality systems improving, and commercialization moving forward. Every company reaches a point where it needs additional leadership.

Recognizing which one you're facing changes everything about the hire you make.

The organizations that seem to grow the smoothest are usually the ones that understand the difference.

This is something I hear leaders wrestle with frequently. This conversation usually comes down to understanding the problem the business is trying to solve before deciding what kind of support will move it forward, not the job title attached to it.