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Leslie Nguyen-Okwu  
Reporter

## This C-Suite Recruiter Has His Eye on You

**Why you should care.**

**Because he knows the secrets to hiring the best employees.**

Rick Devine looks more polished than a front-window mannequin. His suit is creaseless, his black-rimmed glasses smudge-free. The walls are lined with corporate-cheesy pics. But he's aware of business bullshit, and he's trying to eradicate some of it. First up? The dreaded job hunt.

Which requires wiping out Devine's own profession of 30-plus years — recruitment. "You may never need a résumé again," the 59-year-old declares. And then comes the idealistic Silicon Valley punch: "A world where unemployment doesn't exist." Devine's startup TalentSky, launched in February, is an online professional network, and, he hopes, a place for personal growth. For companies, Devine promises a standardized way to define and clarify what they're looking for in new hires and candidates up for promotion. For users: a chance to show off skills beyond the CV. If Facebook and LinkedIn had a baby, it would be TalentSky: a "Moment"-driven time line full of "career highlights" and a comprehensive dossier of employees' peer-rated skills. (Devine scored 60 percent on "Venture Capital Investors" on his own profile.) Job descriptions are "dated," and TalentSky could be a one-stop shop for tracking employee growth and accomplishments, says Paulette Alviti, the human resources chief at Foot Locker, a TalentSky client.

Already, TalentSky boasts companies like Coca-Cola, Target, Foot Locker, IBM and eBay as clients, Devine says. (Foot Locker, Target and IBM all confirmed, while the other companies didn't respond to requests for comment.) His Rolodex and reputation are Devine's most valuable assets: He has decades of recruitment expertise. His biggest claim to fame? Introducing Steve Jobs to Tim Cook (Apple's CEO) in 1998. With nearly \$13 million in hand and some 20,000 user profiles, according to Forbes, Devine remains a small fry — dwarfed by LinkedIn's 450 million users — but he's aggressive and harsh on competitors: "LinkedIn got greedy," he says — they "diluted their purpose to help people manage their careers" and failed to help users leverage their skill sets to strive for a promotion or understand their weaknesses. Still, Devine rests his laurels on TalentSky; he "linked out," deleting his LinkedIn profile last year. LinkedIn, for its part,

recently launched LinkedIn Learning, a course library in partnership with Lynda.com to help users learn new skills or brush up on existing ones. So, skill-building has not quite fallen off their radar, as Devine suggests.

Even so, Devine sees the biggest problem in hiring and human resources as the "skills gap" — employers fumbling to find job applicants with the skills they want and HR managers struggling to identify the strengths of their own employees, so professionals can develop the skills they need. Career paths are no longer mere climbs up the "corporate ladder," but rather a "lattice" of distinct trajectories, says Alviti. TalentSky helps companies augment existing performance review systems by quantifying the skill sets of their own employees. Peer-reviewed skills can then be compared to future job applicants.

Devine is a veteran, having started his career as a headhunter in Silicon Valley in the early '80s. After an injured knee dashed his Olympics marathon dreams, he joined Heidrick & Struggles, a major executive search firm that's placed CEOs at PayPal and Google. Over the years, he hooked up Microsoft with its former COO Rick Belluzzo, PepsiCo with CTO Michael Wondrasch and Apple with Cook, "who wouldn't be there without me," Devine brags. "Within the search profession, Rick is one of the most creative people. He was always looking for ways to get an edge, always had the clients first. ... That's why Tim turned out to be so much more for Apple," says Tom Friel, a former colleague at Heidrick & Struggles. (Microsoft declined our requests for comment; Apple and PepsiCo did not respond.)

Devine came to understand recruiting as a "black box of hopelessness" for many job hunters who endure a punishing process of multistage interviews, rejections and self-doubt. Vying for the attention of tech giants like Google, Twitter and Facebook can feel like "a fortress," he says. To be fair, Devine focused on more high-level recruitment for executives, rather than entry-level candidates. Still, he maintains that after three decades of experience in the business, he understands just how difficult it is not only to find talent, but also how to place it. "It doesn't matter how



▲ Rick Devine.

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<http://www.ozy.com/rising-stars/silicon-valleys-top-tech-recruiter-tells-all/72104>



many applicant buttons you push, because no one's going to want to hire you when you don't have the skills they need," returning to his stump speech.

However, professional networks like LinkedIn and TalentSky have their limitations. "Human beings are incredibly flawed in their assessment of skills," says Jana Rich, a high-profile Valley recruiter. Plus, the nebulous category of "skills" can only say so much about a person. "It's like being on eBay. The cost of actually checking up to find out if what candidates say is real and then the costs when you are wrong are big," says Peter Cappelli, a management professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business. Even with TalentSky's peer-rated system, ratings remain subject to personal biases. And competitors abound: LinkedIn alternatives like Jobcase, BranchOut and LunchMeet have cropped up in recent years. Rich prefers the old-fashioned way — talking to people, which she says provides "color and commentary, not just bits and bytes."

It's clear, though, that employers can be too dreamy about their needs, setting standards so high that they can't afford the people they want, says Cappelli. The golden candidate of an employer's dreams? Perfectly qualified, no need for on-the-job training, with impeccable credentials and no desire for a raise, he explains.

And if ideal candidates don't exist, neither do perfect solutions — Devine, a one-man marketing machine, calls his TalentSky a "network of hope," a "mission on par with global warming." It's blue-sky thinking for another Silicon Valley software startup, and TalentSky might not be prepared for dark clouds on the horizon.