

What is the renewable industry looking for?

Renewable energy companies often have their pick of talented executives because the field is popular, even glamorous. This means that candidates must be resourceful to stand out.

In our recruiting work, we have identified four ways to become more visible and attractive to renewable energy employers.

1. Renewable companies need leaders -- strategic actors who can thread a path through the unknowns and challenges of the major transition underway to low-carbon energy. The way forward is often not clear and risks seem to cloud every option. The stakes are high, and visionary leadership can make the difference between a renewable company that flourishes and one that falters. Identifying candidates with the leadership "X-factor" is not easy, but companies that do so successfully enjoy a tremendous advantage.

Those who are already visionary leaders are probably well along their destined path. For individuals who would cultivate leadership, much work is needed. A long campaign of reading and self-reflection is probably indispensable.

2. Renewable companies need experienced executives. A resume with a strong background in solar or wind is not quite as rare as vision, but still scarce. This requirement presents a hurdle for executives coming from other fields.

Experience at utility-scale projects is the most desirable. Utilities face difficult physical and regulatory constraints, which often interact in ways that are baffling to outsiders. A deep understanding of all facets of generation, storage and transmission is crucial. A track record in supervising installations, in managing a wind power project or getting one built and connected to the grid -- these are solid qualifications.

3. Renewable companies need networkers. Renewable energy is an emerging industry, and as such is still often a small world. Abundant contacts can really help job seekers. Time spent at industry conferences, meeting and talking to contacts, is directly useful and valuable to potential renewable employers. Networking is not a sufficient condition for success in the field, but it's probably a necessary one. Renewable companies need executives who make it a priority. From an employer's point of view, a determined networker is someone who knows how to develop business and stay where events flow fastest.

This is time-consuming and a long-term investment, but it can pay off handsomely in the quest for those in the quest for an executive position.

4. Renewable companies need executives with passion. The fire can burn brightly, or steadily – or both. Some candidates have a devotion to efficiency, or they care about climate change impacts and they want to cut greenhouse gas emissions, or they want the US to be energy independent. Whatever reasons a candidate has for wanting to join the renewable energy business, passion has to blaze forth.

Passion shows through intellectual curiosity and lifelong learning. Apart from adding to one's useful knowledge, the business benefit of this curiosity lies in the ever-evolving nature of the renewables business. Nobody knows what the killer app will be, what blend of technologies will really soar. It is easy to wander down a dead end. Intellectual curiosity is part of what enables executives to survey the landscape objectively and discern what's working and what isn't. This is also an important part of developing one's own leadership capabilities. Progress here carries a double benefit.

Genuinely curious people have breadth as well as depth to their passion. They may pay close attention to the oil business, for example, watching keenly for the myriad ways it influences the renewables business. They may learn more about physics so they have a technical grounding for advances in photovoltaics. Their nose may lead them on journeys through climate modeling or IT issues. The variations are infinite.

An excellent way to demonstrate curiosity is to write articles in the field. Smart candidates can pick a topic and write about it, get it placed somewhere. Having a sheaf of well-researched, thoughtful articles demonstrates seriousness in an instantly credible way. Some candidates start blogs, where they have total control over what appears. For those with the talent, these are persuasive ways to show passion and expertise.

Putting it all together

Any one of these four traits alone is valuable, but probably not sufficient. Two can make a candidate credible. Having three of these traits makes a highly desirable candidate who will have a number of different companies to choose from.

Here as always, genuine visionary leaders are in a class by themselves. True leaders probably need less of the other three traits. But any candidate can improve their odds by showing that they can help renewable energy companies meet these four needs.