

# Unpredictable Times, Unstoppable Leaders.

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In an age of heightened sensitivity, it's no surprise that organisations and the people running them can feel as though they are constantly working under an intense public and media spotlight. Prevailing national mood is often reflected in the atmosphere of high-profile leadership recruitment and, with so much going on, it can be tempting to put career plans on hold. Yet the right approach and thinking at times like this can really unlock opportunities for leaders to take their careers to the next level.

When it comes to big career choices, people worry more than anything about making a decision they can't later undo. However, in 2026, your career path to date and how that looks on paper may be less important than your current reputation, personal impact and leadership legacy. All organisations have transformed to some degree in recent years. Making a good move in 2026 will require you to be balanced in appraising your own strengths, weaknesses and suitability, and to think about risk.

Boards now have more to weigh up when making leadership appointments. Fewer leaders than you might think have CVs that reflect truly linear careers. More leaders who are well suited to our times have arrived in the top job through routes that may even have been considered unconventional just six or seven years ago. As headhunters, we are often matching a broad and diverse range of more atypical leadership backgrounds to the specific situations of individual client organisations.

The bar for leaders is high. The innate complexity of most senior management jobs, and increased risk in an unpredictable external environment, is leading boards to look for the most precise match they can find in their next CEO. Proven leadership experience is attractive, but so is the agility to change tack quickly as situations unfold. Trust and shared accountability is front and centre: the kind of co production needed between boards and SLTs points to leaders with maturity of judgement and a collegiate style.

## Here are five things it may be helpful to keep in mind as you consider your next move.

1. First, you don't need a new job simply because you've been in your current role for a certain period of time. Most established leaders in 2026 have been taking their organisation through successive waves of change. They have continued to develop by taking on those new challenges. We all have a leadership clock inside us that reminds us when it's time for change; but if you're doing well, don't feel you need to move for the sake of it. Your legacy in the role will ultimately matter more than how many years you spent in it.
2. Recruiting the CEO is, at the best of times, the biggest task any board has to complete. Expect the bar to be high and the process to have more stages than usual or a longer decision-making period. It's important to show your commitment to the task of leading that specific organisation in the times we're in: make sure you fully understand its position, priorities and risks from the start. Your task is to persuade the Board that you are exactly the right person to deliver ongoing change and, in doing so, you have the ability to take a broad range of staff and stakeholders with you.
3. As long as you understand an organisation's specific circumstances, and you have matched your skills honestly to the job, there is greater flexibility in moving between permanent and interim leadership roles, between sectors, and to combine executive and non-executive posts. If you want to switch sectors or achieve promotion this year, either move up to the next level within another culturally aligned organisation in your field of expertise, or move at the same level to a new sector. 'Diagonal' moves are riskier, because you will need to develop your leadership skills while also adapting to a new environment: that may be easier to achieve with less going on outside.

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4. A bigger brand and larger organisation will also bring greater exposure – do be honest about whether that is something you want? If your new organisation was to attract greater interest and scrutiny, you may find yourself under the spotlight. Career highlights do not always have to be about household names and high profiles. We recommend selecting a role where the ingredients are in place for a great legacy in a few years' time: a compelling mission, a well-defined task, a united board and a strong team. And if it's fun then don't underestimate that either – we all spend a long time in work. Leave the really tough jobs to the most experienced leaders or career interim managers.
  5. Finally, any organisation worth its salt is going to carry out due diligence and it's important that you do the same. Look for information that tells you what level of influence you would have if the organisation came under pressure while you were running it. Check funding security. Check what's in the public domain and when and how any coverage was reported. Be ruthlessly honest about your fit with the organisation's values and staff culture. Check out the Board, its leadership, reputation and unity. Always trust your instincts: if your gut says no, move on.

Organisations in 2026 are fast-moving and exciting but they are also complicated by many moving parts. We need people like you: phenomenal, ambitious leaders who can see that there is everything to play for. But bad career decisions can be damaging, so this year think about what you want to be best known for and use that to guide your decision-making. A trusted headhunter will always support you in retrieving the information and insight you need to weigh up your options.