

Unlocking Competitive Advantage with Interim Executives

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A True Platform company

In today's dynamic economic environment, both investor-backed and public companies are reconsidering how they add senior talent. In my 15+ years of experience in the interim space, I'm now seeing a significant shift: companies are increasingly embracing senior interim or fractional executives not just as a temporary fix, but as a strategic alternative or complement to traditional full-time positions.

This trend is driven by a critical need for speed, high-quality expertise, and flexibility—alongside the recognition that many seasoned, respected executives are now actively seeking these interim roles for the professional autonomy and potential impact they offer.

In this article, I will share some insights on why interim leadership should be a core component of your talent strategy.



The evolving landscape of executive talent

A decade ago, the term “interim” often carried a certain stigma. There was a perception that short-term leaders were either retirees or candidates who “couldn’t land” a permanent role. However, this has flipped, and interim leadership has moved from a stop-gap measure to a core component of a competitive talent toolkit.

Companies today recognize that proven leaders who intentionally choose project-based or interim work often outperform traditional candidates because they’ve “been there, done that” across multiple business cycles. They can adapt under pressure from day one and deliver immediate value. It isn’t just about filling a role—it’s about injecting battle-tested experience exactly when and where it’s needed most.

Why demand for interim leadership is accelerating

Two forces are converging to accelerate the demand for interim leadership in 2025:

- 1. Market uncertainty and the need for agile skill sets:** When funding and interest rates are volatile, boards understandably hesitate to lock in high fixed costs. An interim hire, therefore, becomes both a risk-mitigation tool and a good way to swap in the exact expertise required the moment circumstances change. I recently saw this illustrated perfectly with a client who was midway through recruiting a strategically oriented full-time CFO. Worsening market signals suddenly shifted priorities to cash preservation. Overnight, the mandate pivoted to an interim restructuring CFO. By tapping interim talent, the company secured the right skillset within weeks and kept the option open to revisit a permanent hire once conditions stabilized.
- 2. The rise of the “portfolio executive”:** Many accomplished executives, particularly those who have successfully led companies through exits, value professional control above all else. They prefer intense, high-impact engagements lasting 3-6 months, followed by time off or a different challenge, rather than committing to another five-year journey with a single company. This model creates a win-win, aligning economic incentives for both the executive and the company.

The true cost of interim vs full-time talent

When clients evaluate interim solutions, they often make the mistake of comparing interim day rates directly to the annual salary of a full-time hire. This isn't an "apples-to-apples" comparison. Three critical cost buckets are frequently overlooked:

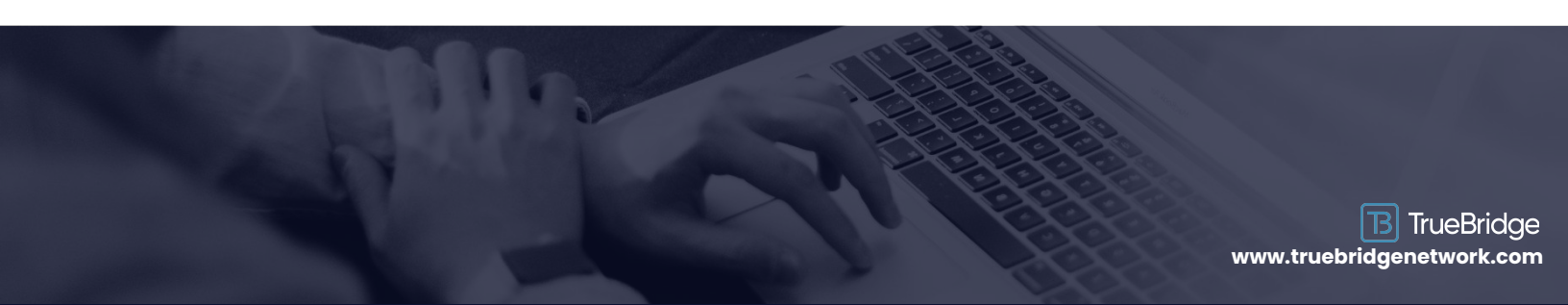
Time-to-hire: A world-class executive search typically takes 90 to 180 days. During this prolonged period, critical initiatives can stall, financial performance can decline, and crucial growth strategies might fail to be implemented simply due to a lack of necessary leadership.

Bad-hire risk: Studies show the true cost of a mis-hire is 3 to 5 times the annual salary once you account for severance, legal fees, lost productivity, and the morale damage within the team.

Total rewards load: Benefits, equity, bonuses, and payroll taxes add another 30-40% on top of base salary. Interim day rates, on the other hand, are fully loaded, transparent, and end when the mandate is complete.

How interim hiring mitigates these costs

- 1 Faster time-to-impact:** At TrueBridge, our pre-assessed network allows us to surface fully-vetted candidates in just 3-5 days and finalize contracts in about 2-3 weeks. This eliminates the costly "waiting period" of a months-long full-time search.
- 2 Pay only for what you use:** Engagements are typically scoped for 3–6 months and can be extended or ended early. You pay only for the capacity and expertise you need, avoiding costs for unused bandwidth.
- 3 No upfront obligation:** Unlike full-time executive searches, interim engagements don't require an upfront commitment, preserving your cash until you're certain you want to hire the interim executive.
- 4 Avoid hidden employment costs:** Typically, there's no need for benefits, equity grants, bonuses, severance, onboarding expenses, or ongoing office overhead associated with an interim leader.
- 5 Lower execution risk:** Our candidates are proven leaders who have already executed similar roles successfully—there are no "step-ups" or learning curves. The "rent-before-you-buy" model also allows both sides to test for fit before making a long-term commitment. About half of our interim leaders are offered full-time roles, but only a small percentage ultimately choose to make the transition, highlighting their preference for a variety of short-term projects.
- 6 TrueBridge handles the admin work:** We streamline the process by taking care of all contracting, payment processing, and reference checks, providing both clients and interim executives with a seamless, low-friction experience.



How to decide if interim is right for your company

In my conversations with leaders, I often encourage them to ask these critical questions to determine if the interim path is appropriate:

“What am I risking by exploring the interim path?” There’s no upfront commitment, so speaking to a few interim executives can help you understand how they might benefit your company. While some might hesitate to add an interim leader amidst other changes, the benefits of speed and expertise often outweigh this concern.

“Can we afford to wait for the perfect full-time hire?” If urgency is crucial, an interim leader can immediately bridge the gap.

“Who must be aligned internally?” A two-week process for an interim placement works best when the board and key stakeholders share clear success criteria and are prepared to engage in an efficient interview process.

“Do we need the same skill set today that we’ll need 12 months from now?” Often, the answer is no. This insight points to a sequential interim-then-permanent plan: bring in an interim leader to solve the immediate problem and help refine, and even evaluate, the candidates for the long-term role.

“Are we aligned on the key priorities that will make this project successful?” Establishing clear, shared objectives at the outset avoids missteps later. An interim executive can spend the first 30-60 days laser-focused on delivering against these objectives, spotlighting gaps early, and refining the mandate before a permanent hire takes over.

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A strategic lever, not a last resort

Interim executives are far more than a stop-gap measure. They are a powerful, strategic lever that enables organizations to de-risk critical decisions, preserve momentum, and access elite operators precisely when—and only when—they are needed. By reframing interim leadership as a proactive talent strategy rather than a last resort, companies can unlock significant agility and gain a crucial competitive advantage in an unpredictable business world.

To explore how TrueBridge can help your organization unlock strategic agility with interim executive talent, please reach out to Brian Lafer at brian.lafer@truebridgenetwork.com.