

Executive Search

An Interview with Jason Hanold, President, CAA Executive Search and Neela Seenandan, President, CAA Leadership Advisory

EDITORS' NOTES Jason Hanold is the President of CAA Executive Search. In 2024, Creative Artists Agency (CAA) acquired Hanold Associates, which Jason Hanold co-founded in 2010 with Neela Seenandan. Hanold focuses on the recruitment of Chief HR Officers, Corporate Officers, and Board Directors. His client roster includes companies that are Fortune 100, start-ups, founder-led, family offices, sports leagues, and PE-backed. Before launching Hanold Associates, he was the Global HR Officers Practice Leader for Russell Reynolds. Previously, he led Global Talent Acquisition for Whirlpool Corporation, was the Head of Recruiting with McKinsey & Company creating their direct-elect partner hiring, and led Global Leadership Recruiting for Deloitte. Hanold serves on the Board of Directors for the National Football Foundation and College Football Hall of Fame, and for a portfolio company of the PE firm, Shore Capital. He is on the Leadership Council of Robert F. Kennedy Human Rights, serves the U.S. Olympic Committee as a Team USA Athlete Mentor, and is a member of SAG-AFTRA. Hanold earned an MS degree from Northwestern University, and a BS degree from Illinois State University.

Neela Seenandan is the President of CAA Leadership Advisory. Before CAA's acquisition, she served as Co-CEO of Hanold Associates. Seenandan provides interim executive services in senior HR positions for clients like The New York Times, The Wella Company, and Save the Children, where she also sits on the Board of Directors. She collaborates closely with leadership teams and boards on organizational effectiveness and executive talent. Previously, Seenandan was SVP of HR for North America's Consumer Business. Prior to Nielsen, she had a successful HR career at Aon Corporation, including serving as CHRO of Aon Benfield and Aon Hewitt, and ran recruiting and professional development for McKinsey & Company in North America and McKinsey Digital (formerly BTO), focusing on executive development and coaching senior leaders. Originally from London, Seenandan holds a degree in English literature and religion from Newcastle University.

COMPANY BRIEF CAA Executive Search (caa.com/executive-search) is a division of the world's leading entertainment and sports agency, Creative Artists Agency (CAA). CAA



Jason Hanold



Neela Seenandan

Executive Search advises leading companies across sports, media, entertainment, technology, consumer brands, gaming, music, and more, as they set out to hire senior leaders across all functions. CAA Executive Search delivers the thoughtfulness and personalized approach of a boutique search firm, while providing access to CAA's extensive ecosystem. CAA Executive Search offers consultative expertise supported by a global network serving North America, Europe, the Middle East, LATAM, Africa, Australia, and Asia. This network ensures access to top executive talent, empowering clients to meet their strategic goals. Beyond its recruitment expertise across all functional areas, CAA Executive Search supports successful leadership/governance transitions, designs organizational structures, advises on inclusion best practices, develops reward strategies, and assists investors with human capital due diligence. To further its reach and better serve a more diverse array of clients and industries, CAA Executive Search acquired Hanold Associates in 2024. Collectively, the group has completed more than 2,000 searches for its clients, which include Fortune 500s, startups, family offices, and pre-IPO companies across CPG, retail, media, hospitality, technology, and more. This acquisition ensures CAA Executive Search is better positioned than ever to serve clients across all industries and functional areas.

What was your vision for founding Hanold Associates and what were the keys to its strength in the industry?

Seenandan: We wanted to deliver a distinctive service offering to our clients while keeping the process simple and efficient. We also set out to assemble a team of people with shared values – kind, good-hearted people

who would work together to provide the best possible service for our clients. We would stay focused and agile so we could quickly deliver exceptional talent and advice to our clients. By focusing on the function of HR and developing a deep specialization in this space, we built a strong reputation in the market as experts in the space who could quickly understand the cultural and professional attributes that are needed to be successful.

Hanold: Our goal was to build a firm that would play an integral role in bettering others. We would aim to help our candidates thrive in their professional endeavors, while working to make our clients' organizations better through the talent we introduce. My career foundation was built on the client side of executive search, leading recruiting and talent acquisition functions for McKinsey, Deloitte and Whirlpool, where I worked with most major search firms. That experience informs how we serve our clients. Our core belief is that if you perform distinctive search execution, it will be such a rare phenomenon for a client that they will tell others about it, and future clients will find you. Our strength is our team, the great people we develop to introduce to our clients, and our search model. We take a team approach to every search, calibrating internally before presenting candidates to clients, so that our clients are seeing the best candidates in the market. These elements together forge our strengths of speed and rigorous execution on a foundation of exceptional core values.

What made you feel that it was the right time and fit for Hanold Associates to become a part of CAA?

Seenandan: As a small team primarily focused on HR for nearly 15 years, we were thinking about how we could broaden our reach and provide growth and development opportunities for our team while continuing to serve the clients and candidates with whom we had developed deep relationships. When we were approached by CAA, we loved the breadth and depth of the agency's platform and the opportunities it gave us to work with new clients – both within the HR world and at the C-suite and Board levels. Most importantly, we quickly realized we had shared values with CAA's leadership which played a critical role in our decision.

Hanold: Hanold had three primary areas of focus – our team, our clients, and our candidates in the market. The first 15 years flew by,

and only recently had we started to think about the next 15. We had forged great friendships with clients who are founders, CEOs, commissioners, athletes, and artists, and we started to feel that our service offering was narrow relative to the support they needed as their respective enterprises scaled. Knowing CAA's reputation, impact, and connectivity, we were immediately struck by the possibilities for our team and clients to come together. Our culture is so critical to us, so we were thrilled to find such incredible cultural alignment. When we met CAA's leadership team, we found our kindred spirits in the focus on care for others and doing our very best for clients and colleagues.

What do you see as the synergies across Hanold Associates and CAA's businesses and clients?

Seenandan: At Hanold, we served across industries with a focus on the executive level role in HR. CAA Executive Search has broad relationships throughout the C-suite. Together, we deliver a broader set of services for our clients. We have strong relationships which allow us to go even deeper into a client and introduce other CAA Executive Search colleagues, fulfilling the full-service model to our clients.

Hanold: With CAA, we have expanded our connectivity, not only helping our CEO clients build better organizations, but also helping them become better leaders. Beyond search, we can now connect our clients to other service areas within the agency, including award-winning divisions like CAA Brand Consulting, CAA Sports Property Sales, or CAA ICON, in addition to facilitating collaborations with other brands and artists, entertainers, and athletes. Our support of leaders can also extend to exploring opportunities for them in publishing, speaking, and podcasts, for example.

Will you provide an overview of CAA Executive Search's capabilities?

Hanold: The world's leading entertainment and sports agency, Creative Artists Agency (CAA) launched CAA Executive Search in 2017, becoming the first major U.S. talent agency to build an executive search practice. CAA Executive Search works closely with its clients to help build diverse leadership

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teams through executive search; designs and develops organizational structures and compensation plans; and engages with investors, venture capital, and private equity firms on human capital due-diligence projects, providing expert insight into senior management teams within acquisition targets. We work on behalf of major global sports rightsholders, technology companies, record labels, esports leagues and franchises, gaming publishers, live entertainment promoters, sports betting companies, traditional and digital media businesses, consumer and luxury goods, global brands, private equity firms, pre-IPO companies, VC funds, startups, founder-led organizations, and Fortune 100 organizations.

Seenandan: Within CAA Executive Search, we also have the Leadership Advisory team. Leadership Advisory consults with clients prior to, during, and after a search to ensure that the organization structure is effective and structured for success. This includes organizational assessment and design work, leadership team coaching and development work, and team effectiveness. We can provide Interim Corporate Officer capability to clients during a period of significant transformation or integration, essentially joining that client's leadership team during the duration of a search process.

How is technology impacting the way executive search operates?

Hanold: Technology platforms are an important part of how we remain connected, communicate, and identify candidates in the market. However, technology cannot replace the human art and science that goes into assessing candidates for alignment to the micro-culture of a leadership team or identifying the dominant behaviors that one will bring into the workplace.

What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership?

Seenandan: I believe the most important keys to effective leadership are listening, taking feedback, and open and transparent communication, including diverse thought and ideas.

Hanold: Employees have tremendous adaptability to different management styles, as long as they believe their leader is authentic. When looking at great leaders, there are a few attributes that the most distinctive leaders share: They do what they say they will do; they are willing to be vulnerable; they are incredibly curious and ask the right questions; they treat others well; and they are genuine. When these attributes come together, it can establish incredible followership. That is, their team will walk through walls to help make them successful.

What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?

Seenandan: Be courageous and take risks. Push yourself outside of your comfort zone. Keep learning and looking for growth opportunities. Work for a great boss and great colleagues who will support you. Ask for and act on feedback. Do work that you love with a company that you are passionate about.

Hanold: Hustle! Find what you love to do, and if you are not doing it, keep pivoting until you find it. Be curious and ask questions, not just now but throughout your life. Be vulnerable, ask for help. Find people who will give you candid feedback and keep them close. Connect and help people along the way. Be kind to everyone. Appreciate that the people who hold the organizational power rarely have the significant titles. Understand that organizational politics exist, but be non-political in your approach. Be selfless and in the spirit of “I’m going to enjoy the journey,” good things will happen. ●

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