

## Executive Summary - Sourcing Tomorrow's Materials Leaders - Ron Malachuk

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[Episode Replay link](#) - Wednesday, February 25, 10 am EST - 60 min

[Executive Roundtable for Materials Growth](#)

Contact: [Kendall Justiniano](#) or [Ron Malachuk](#) for follow-up consultations for your organization.

### Summary

Ron Malachuk brings over 18 years of executive recruiting experience, grounded in a unique background that bridges process engineering and business strategy. He gained early exposure to the intersection of business and human capital strategy during early roles at General Motors. After obtaining an MS in Environmental Management and an MBA from Chicago Booth, he joined the executive search industry in 2008. Today, as a leader at JM Search, a top 10 executive search and board recruiting firm and one of the fastest-growing in the sector, Malachuk has developed deep expertise in sourcing industrial leadership across chemicals, materials, and related markets.

Malachuk identifies several critical themes shaping the industry today: the deepening investment in technology and customer relationships, the rise of smart manufacturing and AI-driven analytics, the push toward sustainable and circular manufacturing, and supply chain resilience in the face of volatility. Malachuk identifies a fundamental leadership challenge: as products mature from specialty to commodity status, organizations must evolve beyond traditional cost-cutting. The industry increasingly needs leaders with learning agility and intellectual curiosity—those capable of embedding new-economy tools like data analytics and AI into legacy systems, and solving complex problems with efficient, objective data interpretation.

### An Industry in Upheaval and Reconfiguration

Understanding these leadership gaps becomes even more critical when viewed against the dramatic market shifts reshaping the industry. Ron identifies a fundamental shift in the chemical industry from a period of robust performance (2010-2023) to one characterized by overcapacity, end-market weakness, and declining demand in historically key growth sectors. Rather than simply dividing assets into core versus non-core categories, companies must strategically focus on markets and products that grow at or above GDP with strong foundational elements for continued investment. This market reconfiguration extends beyond chemicals to discrete and process manufacturing broadly, though select sub-sectors—including aerospace & defense, semiconductors, and A.I./data centers—continue to show growth.

In response to these market pressures, successful companies are deepening customer relationships by becoming true innovative partners and gaining access to end-user data, which creates wider economic moats and maximizes customer retention. Simultaneously, companies are prioritizing supply chain resilience and operational excellence through statistical algorithms, machine learning and predictive maintenance.

The real threat isn't cyclical—it's structural. A significant wave of retirements over the next few years combined with a lack of internal successors. Many companies are now recruiting outsized percentages of executive leadership externally, signaling the urgent need to systematically transfer institutional knowledge.

### The Leadership Imperative - from Expertise to Enterprise Thinking

To navigate this transformation, Ron identifies specific leadership capabilities that differentiate learning organizations from the rest. Ron emphasizes that while there's a candidate-driven market overall, the demand for high-skilled, high-touch, results-oriented leaders still far outweighs supply. This is particularly acute for leaders who combine technical expertise (technology, R&D, innovation) with business acumen and learning agility—the ability to balance "now versus next" thinking that transformation requires.

The critical pivot is from domain expert to leader of people. The ability to lead people – both directly and indirectly – in a global, functionally-driven matrix is a crucial predictor of future leadership success. Top-tier firms build robust career roadmaps, rotating their top 100 leaders across functions, geographies, and business units to create enterprise-wide problem solvers.

What separates top-decile CEOs and ELT members is followership above all other competencies (EQ, IQ, results-focused, bias for action, calculated risk-taking). The real signal of effective leadership is whether people *want* to be on that leader's team and believe in the strategic vision. He illustrates this with the pattern of executives bringing essential former colleagues to new companies—a clear indicator of genuine followership and trust.

## What Makes Executive Search Different from Other Types of Job Search

Ron emphasizes that retained recruiters should play a key role in your executive search and should not be the sole source of opportunities. The key is to develop relationships with search consultants who understand your style, culture, and how you work best. Beyond recruiters, tap into your network of mentors and former colleagues who have gone through executive searches to learn what questions hiring committees prioritize. Additionally, cultivate relationships with investment bankers and private equity professionals early and often—they often have an even deeper lens into where capital is flowing and which skills are in demand, allowing you to tailor your marketing message accordingly.

When aspiring to a significant step up—whether to CEO, CFO, or other C-suite positions—you need more than just the right skills and experiences. You must demonstrate multi-product, multi-geography, and multi-functional responsibility. Equally important is showing your ability to recruit, retain, and develop talent. Take on project work, mentor the next generation, and continuously improve yourself while helping others reskill. This creates a leadership archetype that makes HR leaders want to have you on their team, not because of your title, but because working with you develops their capabilities.

Don't underestimate the power of being physically present. Build deep relationships with executives outside your direct span of control by visiting different geographies quarterly, attending industry conferences, and seeking speaking opportunities. While virtual communication is efficient, the relationships and impact you create in person—whether at dinner, walking a floor, or presenting at a conference—are crucial in building your internal and external brand. These visible commitments to growth and connection signal to decision-makers that you're committed to blending technical skills with the proper leadership attributes.

## Private Equity's New Reality: Execution Over Financial Engineering

For companies navigating this transformation through private equity ownership, the dynamics are even more acute. Ron explains that private equity's approach to value creation has fundamentally shifted. While financial engineering once drove deal value, it's now commoditized, making execution and operational excellence the primary differentiators. PE sponsors operate within a finite ownership window and must be strategic with capital deployment—every dollar spent is one less available at exit. This means investments in people, processes, and teams are highly targeted. The challenge today is that many assets acquired during the post-COVID restocking period (2021-2022) face shifted market conditions, regulatory changes, and macroeconomic headwinds that invalidate the original investment thesis, forcing PE firms to make leadership changes.

Lastly, as the hold of assets (from the date of entry to the date of exit) continues to increase in private, leaders increasingly have to pivot to macroeconomic and business environment shifts. This further requires resilience and discipline in optimizing the asset while maintaining a results-driven, KPI-led focus.

## About Ron Malachuk

[Ron Malachuk](#) is a Partner at [JM Search](#) and a member of the Firm's Chemicals and Process Industry Practice. Over his career as an executive search and talent consultant, Ron has conducted C-Suite (CEO, CFO & COO), and Senior Advisor searches and leadership projects across multiple sectors, including agribusiness, chemicals, engineering and construction, materials, packaging and plastics. His clients include global industrial conglomerates, the Fortune 500, middle market manufacturing organizations, and portfolio companies of leveraged buyout and venture capital firms.

He has also authored several white papers on the emerging technology and digital trends disrupting the process industries.

Prior to executive search, Ron's experience includes mergers integration, corporate strategic planning, and project management with Wells Fargo, General Motors and Exelon Corporation, respectively.

Ron earned his B.S. in Chemical Engineering and his M.S. in Environmental Management from the Illinois Institute of Technology, and his MBA from the University Of Chicago Booth School Of Business.

## About Roundtable Host, [Growth Arc Advisors LLC](#)

After a 30 year career as an executive in the chemical industry, founder [Kendall Justiniano](#) started Growth Arc Advisors to help chemical business leaders implement the new thinking required for changing fundamentals. We're experienced industry operators who know the old playbooks, their gaps, and the new pages required.

The firm delivers customized engagements for Materials Executives in 3 key areas:

**Commercial Effectiveness:** increasing growth revenue through proven next-level commercial practices, including digital sales & marketing.

**Strategy:** helping clients navigate threats generated by sustainability, digital, and global demand shifts.

**Innovation:** accelerating return on innovation through focused investment.