



## A Recruiter of Recruiters Talks About Finding Search Pros

By Sarah E. Needleman

Executive-search professionals are on the hunt for their own kind.

Demand for recruiters has been growing amid the improving U.S. economy and is expected to continue to rise through the first half of 2007, says Janet Jones-Parker, managing director of Jones-Parker/Starr, a Chapel Hill, N. C., search firm.

"Companies are actively increasing their hiring," says Ms. Jones-Parker, 63, who specializes in recruiting recruiters for other search firms. She's a past president of Association of Executive Search Consultants and co-editor of "The Executive Search Collaboration: A Guide for Human Resources Professionals and Their Search Firms" (Quorum Books, 1990).

Ms. Jones-Parker recently discussed the job-market prospects for executive-search professionals with CareerJournal.com.

**CareerJournal:** Where is demand greatest for recruiters?

**Ms. Jones-Parker:** If you're an experienced partner who is able to generate as much as \$1 million in client-related fees, it goes without saying that you can go just about anywhere. Senior associates are in very high demand, and I don't think there is any firm that doesn't need associates or junior partners who can help execute searches and bring in business.

There is a tremendous shortage of recruiters in financial services because there was a significant cutback during the economic downturn following the tech bubble burst. There are a number of firms that do not have a strong financial-services practice. You'll find that firms are taking individuals from in-house corporate staffing positions as well as those at corporations who do not have executive-search experience.

Biotechnology is also very strong. It remained stronger than other sectors during the downturn. It's just a growth business and, with the aging population, I expect that to continue.

Consumer retail is the next in line. There aren't enough recruiters in the business. It became sleepy during the downturn, but now it's taking off again. Consumer demand is up, and business is responding in the marketplace.

Another industry that we don't think about is commercial real estate. There is a shortage of executive search-consultants in real-estate construction, finance, management. There are only a few boutiques that specialize in this area. So if one had the knowledge base to get into real-estate recruiting, that would be a great area to choose. You wouldn't have a lot of competition.

**CJ:** What's most challenging about being a recruiter?

**Ms. Jones-Parker:** Matching the culture, needs and interests of both parties. Making sure that what the client is offering is truly answering the needs of the candidate.

You're always looking for what's missing for the candidate in their current job. It could be that they are not paid what the market is paying. It could be a change in management. Maybe the firm doesn't have a clear direction or business plan.

**CJ:** How do you break into recruiting?

**Ms. Jones-Parker:** You want to go to work as an associate for a partner who has a very robust practice in an area where you have a lot of knowledge and experience, so you can begin to execute that partner's overflow work. As you execute work, you develop your reputation, so when someone asks how many searches have you done, you have an answer, and you will be able to move into that next level as a senior associate and then a partner over time.

**CJ:** What kind of pay can career changers expect to earn initially?

**Ms. Jones-Parker:** Depending on what your compensation was in industry, your starting salary as a search consultant will probably be lower. If you were making \$300,000 or \$400,000 a year and had stock options and benefits, you will not have that as you start out. Most search firms are privately held companies and revenue production is much slower. You're going to go through a transition period when your base compensation will likely be less than it was when you had a corporate position. You will catch up probably within two to three years and then you will definitely have an opportunity to significantly exceed what you were previously earning. But not everybody is willing to do that and take that risk. That's why it's so difficult to recruit someone into the business. [Partners and senior recruiters at retained executive search firms earn a median \$240,000 and \$139,500, respectively, in total annual compensation, according to a 2006 survey from Kennedy Information Inc., an industry-research provider in Peterborough, N.H.]

**CJ:** What skills do you look for in recruiter candidates?

**Ms. Jones-Parker:** You have to have business knowledge of a certain sector from working or recruiting in it for long enough. You have to be passionate about recruiting and business development. Sales skills are absolutely key. You have to be able to organize your thoughts and put together pitches that represent the firm, yourself and your partners. Then you have to have the ability to discern and analyze. You have to understand what your client is looking for, recognize what it is a candidate is telling you, and intuitively be able to understand if that matches your clients' needs. It's both an art and a science. You have to be able to combine the two.

**CJ:** What's the most difficult part of your job?

**Ms. Jones-Parker:** Finding qualified people. It goes back to when the bubble burst in 2000, and so many people left the business. They didn't have enough depth in the business to sustain themselves financially during the downturn. Major firms and boutiques had to cut back, so the next generation -- the ones who would've had nice experience by now -- were laid off. Some of them are trying to come back into the business, but many left for good.

The hardest part of my job is getting recruiters to focus on their own careers. They're focused on their clients, not on themselves.

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