



Pay Grade: Experts In Finding the Right Fit

By Sarah E. Needleman

The job: Executive recruiter

The pay: Retainer search firms pay recruiters regardless of whether they complete a search assignment for a client. The median annual earnings for experienced retained recruiters, including salary and bonus, is \$139,500, according to a 2006 survey by Kennedy Information Inc., Peterborough, N.H. Base salary is generally far lower at contingency firms, if paid at all, as their recruiters typically make the bulk of their earnings from commissions. The median annual income for experienced contingency recruiters is \$122,000, Kennedy's survey shows.

The hours: Executive recruiters typically have flexible work schedules but are expected to be accessible most of the time, including evenings, weekends and holidays. "If you're working on a global assignment, you might have to get up really early to make that work," says Victoria Reese, a partner at Heidrick & Struggles International Inc.

Benefits: Most retained employers offer standard medical and dental coverage as well as prescription-drug and 401(k) plans, but such benefits are less prevalent at contingency firms. Some high-grossing search firms provide profit-sharing and retirement-savings programs for senior management. Self-employed recruiters must develop their own packages.

Other incentives: In recent years, some retainer firms have begun offering equity to seasoned employees and new senior-level hires as part of their retention programs, says Janet Jones-Parker, managing director of Jones-Parker/Starr, a Chapel Hill, N.C., search firm that specializes in finding recruiters for other search firms.

Career path: Executive recruiters must be highly self-motivated and have strong analytical, communications and sales skills. Recent college graduates can expect to start out as researchers or account coordinators responsible for identifying potential clients and passive candidates. Strong performers may advance to project manager or director, leading teams of junior recruiters on search assignments. A recruiter could eventually move up to partner or managing director.

Best part of the job: "It is so cool when you talk with candidates after they take on a job and find out that they love it," says Mark Reisner, a managing director in Spring House, Pa., who does retained search for the Merwin Group.

Worst part of the job: "You really have to kill what you eat," says Dennis Nason, president of Nason & Nason Inc., a contingency-based search firm in Coral Gables, Fla. "If you are not successful, you don't get paid." Adds Erika Weinstein, president of Stephen-Bradford Search Inc., a retained search firm in New York, "My product walks and talks. You can prep your clients to ask certain things of a candidate, because they need the information to make a decision, and they get sidetracked talking about golf."

Hiring: Recruiters say they typically contact search firms directly about their interest in a job. Some recruiting companies list openings and accept résumés at their Web sites, and a few large employers post ads on Internet job boards. The Association of Executive Search Consultants, a professional group based in New York, offers job postings to members at www.aesc.org/opportunities.php.

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