

OCTOBER 2011

Attention Employers: If You Want Top Talent, You Are Going To Pay For It

John Nimesheim

SENIOR MANAGING DIRECTOR



Despite the apparent softening of the U.S. economy, and the broad labor market, demand for top tier executive talent continues to be high. An increasing number of employers are awakening to a startling realization: with the increased executive movement over the last year or so, their executive bench strength is simply not deep enough. Although many can rely on emerging leaders within their own organizations to grow into these key roles, many others will have to target exceptional, external talent to push performance higher, and navigate through the uncertainty of today's economic environment.

The search for high-demand, low supply talent is growing far more complex and costly than ever before. Many companies incorrectly assume today's talent market is a buyer's market, and thus can expect to recruit this talent with minimal or marginal increases in pay. Not so. This year we experienced a significant increase in year-over-year hiring at the executive level, driven much by a demand to bring in higher caliber talent and build the bench. It has always been a challenge to identify and attract the top 'A' players. But what we have found is how many are not aware how expensive it can be to successfully recruit them.

Top-tier candidates willing to explore new opportunities generally have an array of roles from which to choose from; perhaps not to the level we saw in the late 1990's and in early 2000, but there are still an exceptional number of opportunities.

Once the ideal candidate is identified, the hard work begins. There is a very narrow window of opportunity to capture the interest and the heart of that candidate. If the employer doesn't go the extra mile to accommodate a top recruit or promotion prospect from the outset, there will undoubtedly be another opportunity waiting in the wings.

My suggestion to employers actively seeking top candidates for significant roles in their organizations: acknowledge the market reality that top performers' compensation programs are quite generous in today's competitive market, and be prepared to pay the market rate. A less-than-market compensation plan presented to an "A" player will almost certainly send you back to the well for another candidate.