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Finding the middle ground in staffing

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Finding a PR pro that has five to seven years of experience is a difficult task on its own.

Appealing to this group's preferences - which can include workplace environment, alternative compensation, flex time, a nurturing culture, and leadership tracks - while not overpaying, makes this area of recruitment even more challenging. But while good PR help is hard to find, it's not impossible.

When Lilly Jan sought to plunge back into PR in early 2008 following a year off, which included relocating from San Francisco to Boston for graduate school, her priorities were different than when she started more than five years ago.

"At this point in my career, I am in a transition, looking for a dynamic environment to develop," Jan says. Less than a month after sending her first resume, Jan accepted an SAE post at Newman Communications.

"There was the Boston scene, the convenience of Newman's location to complete my graduate work, and, most importantly, the opportunity for leadership and strategic work," Jan continues, citing the lure of independent work with clients.

Kate Jay, who recently took an account supervisor position at Trevelino/Keller Communications Group in Atlanta, was also looking for the chance to grow and learn.

"Like anyone else, we're a group concerned with monetary compensation, but we've learned along the way that other things matter," Jay says, who admits she was also drawn by a well-rounded package - including benefits, vacation time, and bonuses.

Jay cautions recruiters against overselling or underselling a company or position.

"If you're upfront and honest about the opportunities available, then you're going to get people who are

genuinely interested and will be happy in the position," she says.

Dean Trevelino, principal of Trevelino/ Keller, says he finds compensation is important, but not as big a driver for this group as the AD or VP level, who have more substantial family and financial responsibilities.

To find such candidates, Trevelino primarily relies on his network within Atlanta and listings with PRSA Georgia.

"We purposefully do not run national advertising because we believe that you have got to want to be in Atlanta first, versus finding a job opportunity with us and then agreeing to move to Atlanta," he notes.

Jennifer Prosek, managing partner of CJP Communications, advises a proactive course. "At CJP, we regularly make 'investment hires' when we find the right candidates," she says. "Most people at this level have perfected their PR skills and are now looking for the next challenge - to manage a team."

Prosek recommends showcasing how potential is nurtured through career development programs, formal training, or mentoring; displaying culture through the work environment and other employees; and to consider alternative compensation models.

"CJP has a 'Commission for Life' program that rewards our team for new business," Prosek says. "We reward people over the life of the account, not just for the first year."

Meanwhile, Keith Pillow, VP at Abelson Group, says professionals with this level of experience are typically entrenched - both at agencies and in corporate departments - and an array of resources must be used. That includes job postings on multiple sites, social and in-person networking, referrals, and having recruiters work on a contingency basis.

"Recruiters are a last resort for pros at this level, as the recruiter's fee cannot often be justified with the candidate's salary," Pillow says. "Social networking sites, such as LinkedIn and Facebook, are becoming more popular, as well as new tools, such as NotchUp.com, where candidates can receive fees just for interviewing with employers."

Candidates at this level often seek more money than the standard, and realize they are in a good bargaining position because its difficult to hire people, says Christine Merenda, a recruiter for Lois Paul & Partners.

"I caution hiring managers to be careful of this, because even though we all want to hire good candidates, it is important to remember we don't want to inflate salaries just to get someone in the door," she says.

Do

Exhaust all channels and keep searching

Fully vet candidates to ensure they have the skills and will gel with the culture

Consider alternate compensation models and programs

Don't

Be blinded by a candidate's outstanding resume

Be overly picky. A solid candidate can often be molded

Overpay or forego a thorough background check