



Jobs: Finding right person for the job

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The San Antonio branch of Allen Austin Executive Search Consultants is busy with ringing phone calls and incoming e-mail.

So far this year, Jackie Gorman-Johnson, the local partner of the Houston-based firm, has found executives to fill twice as many openings as she filled in 2005 and she has four additional searches under way.

"Business is going very well now," said Gorman-Johnson, 47, who began conducting executive searches after spending 15 years with the Texas Engineering Extension Service at Texas A&M University.

Gorman-Johnson is benefiting from a global increase in demand for consultants who can help companies fill positions that pay more than \$100,000 a year and jobs that have a major impact on companies' performances, such as chief executives, finance department heads and production managers.

Executive search consultants generated more than \$7.5 billion in revenues in 2005, according to the New York-based Association of Executive Search Consultants. Revenues are expected to increase 20 percent this year.

Much of the business goes to the four largest firms, Korn/Ferry International, Spencer Stuart, Heidrick & Struggles, and Russell Reynolds Associates Inc.

But boutique shops, such as Houston-based Allen Austin, which has 14 Executive search consultant search consultants, are seeing increased demand.

Most executive search consultants work either as contingency consultants, who are paid only if they fill a position, or as retained consultants, who are paid regardless of whether they find the needed employee.

In 2004, Gorman-Johnson opted to be a retained consultant to have some guarantee of payment in a field that is based solely on commission.

There is still a lot of uncertainty in the job.

Allen Austin's chief executive officer trained her for four days and then left her to find clients and job candidates, screen applicants, present candidates and negotiate contracts to fill positions.

- **Job description:** Find employees for clients.
- **Education requirements:** None, although two-thirds have bachelor's degrees and prior work experience in marketing, management or finance, according to the Association of Executive Search Consultants
- **Average pay:** More than \$100,000 a year for retained consultants

Gorman-Johnson decided to specialize in filling posts in higher education and nonprofit institutions to build on her previous work experience as division head of career advancement and applied technology training.

Then she began answering university requests for proposals and calling institutions to offer her services.

Still, she went nearly six months before signing her first contract with Middle America Cox cable company.

"I had given myself one more week to make it work when I landed the first contract," she said. "Then I got three contracts back-to-back."

Gorman-Johnson often relays the tale to would-be executive search consultants to stress the need to have financial reserves before entering the field.

"You've got to be prepared to go without making any money five to six months," she said.

Today much of her search strategy is designed to minimize time.

Gorman-Johnson meets with the employer to nail down the desired expertise and job duties for the future employee. She solicits most referrals and interviews by phone or e-mail. Candidates are asked to fill out a six-page questionnaire via e-mail before she interviews them.

"Then I can spend the interview following up on those answers, and if they are willing to spend the time to answer questions — and they are detailed — then I know they are definitely serious about the position," she said.

She conducts reference checks and compiles detailed bios and transcripts of conversations with each candidate before turning the information over to the employer for review. Employers have had her arrange interviews with finalists, pick up candidates as they arrive for company interviews and negotiate contracts.

Gorman-Johnson found staying involved through each step increases the likelihood that the employer will find a candidate that fits its needs. That's important because Allen Austin guarantees the employee will stay with the new employer at least one year.

On the line is her share of the hefty search fee. Allen Austin charges an employer one-third of all cash payments made during the employee's first year at work. That includes salary, bonuses, car allowances, and housing payments — but excludes moving costs. Gorman-Johnson gets an undisclosed share of that fee.

"You can make well into the six figures easily," she said. "It depends solely on how many hours you are willing to work."

Sometimes potential job candidates get offended when she won't allow them to interview for a job if they don't meet the employer's minimum education or work requirements.

"I have to explain that I don't find jobs for people," she said. "I find people for jobs. My relationship is with the employer."

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