



HR STRATEGIES

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Why top talent continues to choose Vancouver

In the story "Home truths hurt talent search" (issue 1127; May 31-June 6), several executive recruiters warned that Vancouver-based employers lose out on recruiting top talent due to our red-hot housing market and high cost of living.

While this is true, there is also no denying the fact that a lot of people have deliberately chosen to make Vancouver their home, despite the challenges of the city's affordability.

When asked about the origin of applicants to the BC Cancer Foundation, Cindy Dopson, director of human resources, said that only 50% of all resumes actually come from B.C. A large number are being received from Alberta, followed by other provinces, mainly Saskatchewan, Ontario and Quebec. On top of that, quite a few resumes come from the U.S. When screening those applicants, it turns out that most of them are keenly aware of what they are getting themselves into.

To avoid surprises later on, recruiters at Lululemon Athletica cover the home truths right off the bat. Most importantly, though, they stress what still makes Vancouver such a desirable place to move to.

"We tell them, 'Yes, your place will likely be smaller, but it might only be a few blocks away from the ocean. Your commute might be 10 minutes by ferry as opposed to two hours in traffic. Thirty minutes and you're in the mountains,'" said Stephanie Corker-Irwin, head of recruitment at Lululemon.

All this is part of a well-developed recruitment strategy as the company purposefully looks to hire people who embrace the West Coast lifestyle, which is also part of Lululemon's corporate culture, states Corker-Irwin.

"We are not looking for people who want to replicate their NYC lifestyle, but rather who will embrace the beautiful experiences here in Vancouver."

Eric Perez, HR director at WorleyParsons, remembers discussions with candidates from places like Texas, where taxes and cost of living are substantially lower compared to Vancouver. Surprisingly, some have told

him they would much rather live in a society that values inclusivity and has a strong social culture.

That said, Perez is still cognizant of the fact that financial concerns are a reality for hiring managers looking to bring people to Vancouver. But if companies can't ease the pain by maxing out their budgets and paying newcomers top dollars, what else can employers do?

Perez suggests that recruiting managers are forced to really understand their candidates much better.

"This is a great opportunity for companies to see what else they can do to accommodate their candidates' personal and family needs."

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- Stephanie Corker-Irwin, head of recruitment, Lululemon

In her career as an HR professional, Sabeeha Pardhan, now HR manager at Molson Coors Canada, would routinely connect new hires with real estate agents, invite potential candidates to events in Vancouver and offer assistance in finding work for their spouses.

"You really have to spend time with them to find out what they want," Pardhan said, recalling situations where new hires were offered regular flights home and exceptions were allowed to vacation and education reimbursement policies. In one case, a paid golf club membership did the trick, registered as a taxable benefit.

Other than meeting candidates' unique needs, some companies have understood that building extraordinarily strong corporate brands can withstand the challenges of a place where many think only the rich can afford to buy. Lululemon is a great example.

The same goes for organizations such as the BC Cancer Foundation, which is known as one of the top fundraising organizations in the province.

Vancouver's hot housing market and high cost of living is a reality companies have little control over. What they are in control of,

however, is their brand as employers of choice. Companies like Lululemon know exactly who fits their culture. They have mastered the art of attracting the right talent by focusing on all the things that truly matter to their people outside of basic monetary needs.

In this market, employers

have two choices: they can complain about how the housing market prevents them from recruiting top people to Vancouver or they can start to think what unique value they can offer to meet their employees' non-financial needs. Which option will your company pick? ■

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