

## RECRUITMENT

# Sharpening your competitive edge

By Jeff Forbes

**S**HELBURNE. ANTIGONISH. YARMOUTH. Halifax. What do these communities have in common? All are Nova Scotian communities. And all are, in the eyes of many corporate managers and executive candidates based outside our region, rural communities.

I know this perception may be hard to accept for people who own or manage Halifax-based companies. But the fact remains that senior leaders who are looking to make a career change see this city, and province, as offering limited opportunities for advancement. There is some basis for such beliefs—we have a smaller population base and there are fewer large corporations and head offices here than in Toronto. So, executives who do come here find that their choices are limited when the time comes to explore other employment options. They also see few future employment prospects for their children. For these reasons, Nova Scotia has a reputation as a place you move away from, not to, to pursue your career goals.


Though these perceptions may seem insurmountable when recruiting for senior level positions, you can attract the talent you need no matter where your company is located. The key is to understand the needs of your candidates and the competition you face from other employers and communities across Canada or around the world. Though we live and conduct business in a global economy, too often we focus on inter-provincial competition for

executive talent, such as Shelburne companies squaring off against organizations based in Halifax. What we forget is that Halifax is vying with Toronto-based companies to fill similar positions, Toronto with New York and the Big Apple with markets like Hong Kong and London.

So if you want to stay competitive as an employer, you need to think globally, not locally. Look at what companies around the world have to offer employees and see how you measure up. For example, what are the average salaries, benefit packages and advancement opportunities that candidates can expect from employers in your industry in other markets? What can your organization do to match or better those incentives? Are there any advantages or programs you have or can offer through your organization that are not offered or available through competing firms? Make these the heart of your recruitment efforts.

It's also important to look beyond your company to see how your community measures up to competing global markets when it comes to quality of life. Work-life balance is increasingly important to top-flight executives and professionals. How does your community fare in areas such as length of daily commute, recreational facilities and cultural events? Is your community family-friendly? Is the quality and availability of essential services such as public schools, daycare programs or health facilities equal to or better than that offered by other communities? Remember that

uprooting a family is a major decision for a senior candidate and if your community can't provide the variety or calibre of fundamental services and opportunities that candidates and their families want, they will look elsewhere. Consider providing onboarding services for candidates that help ease their transition into your organization and the community.

There is one other way to gain an edge in recruiting executive candidates—get to know them. Not just the qualifications they have to offer but what they are looking for professionally and personally. Do their career goals match the roles and career path your organization can offer? Are their personality and leadership style suited to your organization's unique culture? Are they looking to remain in or relocate to a quiet, rural community away from the stresses of big city life? The more you know your candidates, the easier it is to determine if they are great fits for your company and to tailor the position so it meets their needs, and yours. This way, you can successfully recruit the best talent from anywhere in the world. What's more, you can help shift perceptions about Nova Scotia from rural communities offering limited opportunities to the dynamic, growing communities that we really are. 

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