

AS SEEN IN
San Diego Daily Transcript
Friday, November 14, 2008

San Diego Daily Transcript

Close-Up: Steven Hochberg

Caliber recruits best and brightest for life science industry

By ELIZABETH MALLOY

Caliber Associates' small office near University City is adorned with several paintings of Grateful Dead frontman Jerry Garcia, a reflection of co-founder and President Steven Hochberg's personal taste in music.

His love of psychedelic-fringed folk rock is "completely ancillary" to his work running the executive search firm, Hochberg said, but it does illustrate a tactic he likes to use when trying to find the right executive for a client.

"Whether or not it's music, wine or some other hobbies, often times when I'm interviewing candidates, breaking the ice and really relating to them on a comfort zone issue is a great insight into what they're like as a person," Hochberg said.

Figuring out what a candidate is like as a person is important for Caliber Associates. The firm specializes in finding high-ranking executives for life science companies. To even be considered, the candidates must already have a high threshold of education and experience. Caliber finds executives for companies that range from major pharmaceutical companies to small startups, so the right person needs a personality that fits the team and situation they'd be coming into.

"If we're talking about a CEO for an emerging company, one of the key issues is funding of that company. So someone that comes with a very, very good background and experience of being able to raise the money necessary to continue operations is important," Hochberg said.

"Likewise, if a company is at a point where they're awaiting product approval, someone with commercial launch experience becomes more important."

Hochberg co-founded Caliber Associates 20 years ago, after a career in life sciences. He headed the human resources department for the research and development wing of a company called Rorer Pharmaceuticals, which has since been absorbed by Sanofi-Synthelabo.

Caliber Associates has two offices, one in San Diego and another near Philadelphia. Those positions keep the firm ensconced in the country's two main biotech corridors, on the east and west coasts. The firm has only seven employees; in a situation Hochberg likens to "the shoemaker's kids walking barefoot," he said they sometimes struggle to find the people with the right skill sets to work for them.

However, Hochberg said he likes the fact that the firm is small, with a boutique feel. In concentrating on just life science companies, he said the company can do a better job of honing in on exactly what its clients want.

In order to find a company the right candidate, Hochberg and his staff begin by asking the company what it wants. This sounds obvious, but when you're dealing with boards of directors, it's sometimes easier said than done.

"Our job, first and foremost, it involves sitting down with the client and really



trying to immerse ourselves in what that client's culture is all about and then kind of getting a laser sharp focus into what the role of the individual ... would be," he said.

Once Caliber has that information, the firm begins a "strategic research effort" to find people who fit the role. The first place to look: The client's competitors.

"We refer to those people as ... passive job seekers," Hochberg said. They're, "very, very happy doing what they're doing, and really not at all actively looking for work, but rather might be receptive to a compelling opportunity."

Caliber Associates helps its clients craft those "compelling opportunities" as well, doing market research on what kinds of salaries and benefits would make a person want to leave a job they like.

"We've placed, over the past 20 years, more than 500 key executives in roles," Hochberg said.

Caliber also tracks how long its picks have stayed with companies, and about 70 percent have stayed for more than five years and been promoted at least once. Some of the companies Caliber has worked with include Genzyme, Elan, Cephalon and Santarus. It has worked for more than 100 companies, from the global scale to emerging companies.

While many companies are shedding employees right now in the face of a recession, Hochberg said Caliber has seen market shifts before in its history, and he's "long-term bullish" on the life science sector.

"Our passion comes from knowing that we are really helping companies find the people who find the cures to life threatening diseases," he said. "We feel that the sector itself will be very robust and growing for the next 20 years."