

Getting regional



The Slovak market is limited and as a result the Slovak labor market is limited as well. Not big news, I know, but sometimes it seems that not everyone is aware of this.

Headhunters like me regularly meet members of senior management who want to keep an eye on the market. When an interesting opportunity appears, they want to know about it. It is good to be informed about the market and its trends so that a company can benchmark its own competencies, responsibilities and remuneration with the market if necessary.

What surprises me when talking to this category of potential candidates is their lack of mobility. Yes, they understand the necessity of traveling, but ideally they usually want to stay within 50 km of Bratislava and spend no more than 20% of their working time doing it.

There are two groups of people who usually think this way. The first group is made up of managers who plan to return home after working abroad for some time. These people have had a nice international career and proven that a Slovak employee can be as good as an employee from a country like Switzerland when it comes to things like market segmentation, marketing strategies and their implementation in Europe. Family

is the most common reason for moving back home. Their children may be ready to start school or a spouse may want to pursue his or her own career. In such cases it is understandable that an individual would make his or her family a priority and organize his or her work schedule accordingly.

The second group of managers I meet is different. Most are in top positions and have a comfortable life at home. They naturally have very demanding jobs and have worked hard to reach their status, though at some point they may wish to advance their careers. They may be interested in a new position, a new sector, or more responsibility, but ideally this new position needs to be somewhere around Bratislava and the required travel no more than 20% of their time. Sometimes I wonder if these people ever get the desired new job. I also wonder whether they really want the change at all.

The only chance to develop a more international, more demanding career is to find a regional career, "To get regional." Slovak students who are emerging young experts in various fields seem to understand

this; a surprisingly high number of them can be found in top corporations or regional headquarters. Why is this the case? Because they understood the Slovak market's limitations early and were confident enough to get regional!

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One way to do this is to be sent abroad through the company and follow a planned career development program. The other way is to look outside of the organization and start searching for interesting job opportunities abroad. Vienna, for example, is home to the headquarters of 180 different corporations. That's quite a big number. Even half that would be enough to provide lots of opportunities. Looking for jobs at a regional headquarter has a big advantage since such offices usually have to hire foreigners. As an example, let's look at a company whose headquarters for the CEE region are in Vienna. The team would perhaps consist of at least 50% Austrian employees, and then some people sent from overseas or a global headquarters office. However, it is important that they also hire "local" CEE managers. This is a big opportunity for managers who may feel that the Slovak market is too limited and who aren't afraid

of entering a more demanding, sometimes more professional and clearer battlefield. It allows these managers to compare their own skills with those of people from a wider region.

It's important to remember that the market in the CEE gets regional whether we want it to or not. Global headquarters do not look at individual countries. Rather, they look at clusters or regions. They look for managers with a helicopter view, those who focus on solutions, who can both explain a solution and develop a workaround and those who are able to operate across organizational units on a regional level. In surveying the positions we at TARGET Executive Search have been dealing with, a new trend is clear. We find individuals to fill positions such as a Commercial Director for the CEE, a European Sourcing Manager, a European Industrial Engineer, a General Manager for the CEE, or Head of Operations, Europe. It is clear that nationality doesn't matter anymore.

Therefore, my best advice is this: Get regional! Start looking at regional opportunities. Don't be shy about entering international tenders. On the other hand, don't overvalue your experience. The fact that you have built a great career in Slovakia may not mean a lot if a tender requirement is "a proven international sales management record." I believe that benchmarking one's own skills with those of other regional managers can only help. This is the best way for an individual to satisfy his own ambitions and develop his career at a new level.



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