



HUDSON RPO

A photograph of a female scientist in a white lab coat and blue gloves, focused on using a pipette in a laboratory. The background shows various lab equipment like bottles, racks, and a microscope.

**The War for
Talent in the
US Pharma/
Life Sciences
Sector**

The War for Talent in the US Pharma Sector

Talent Acquisition leaders are faced with a unique set of challenges in the current market including extreme competition, soaring compensation packages, hiring in a market with acute talent shortages and trying to evaluate new tech innovations.

TALiNT Partners and Hudson RPO convened a panel of TA and HR experts from across the pharmaceutical, life sciences and healthcare sectors to discuss the challenges they face and the approaches they are utilizing.

TALiNT Partners' Employer Program Director, Debra Sparshott provided aggregated statistical analysis of key roles in the sector across the US to frame the discussion. Notable highlights were huge disparities in average pay with highly inflated salaries in large cities. Additionally, the analysis showed tenure of over eight years for some potential candidates, further compounding the escalating battle for talent with high compensation. Higher salaries as seemingly the only weapon to attract talent is putting smaller firms and those trying to recruit outside their locality at a significant disadvantage.

Soaring compensation packages

The statistical picture certainly resonated with the panel. Gary Jones, Director of Talent Acquisition at Hudson RPO, Life Sciences Division, reflected "the candidate pool is a lot healthier than ever before, but it's also a lot more competitive" and government stimulus packages form part of that competition, making individuals choose not to work.

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Director of TA at a quality compliance and technical services firm

With increasingly inflated compensation packages and job titles, many organizations are breaking their own salary band levels just to secure talent. "I routinely see people being



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overtitled and overpaid for the levels that they're at, and that's been a big challenge for us" reflected an Associate Director of TA at a leading US muscle biology therapy company. An HR specialist at a US-based consulting firm highlighted the knock-on effect for legacy employees, "We're wheeling and dealing and making some deals that we normally wouldn't have and we didn't do for existing employees so that creates inequities. It's a dangerous flow." Panel members shared other initiatives like daily pay and commented that sign-on bonuses were now routine.

Additionally, many candidates, who have worked remotely for over a year, are not prepared to relocate or attend site. The VP of HR explained: "candidates want to stay remote when their entire team would sit here in South San Francisco. It's tough to try and bridge that gap with us because our culture is not ready for remote leadership." Some candidates are reluctant to go back on site, particularly within manufacturing "a lot of our jobs have to be on site. And I'm having trouble with people wanting to work remotely" explained the Director of Talent Acquisition from a quality compliance and technical services firm.

Get back control and be proactive

It can seem like the challenges are beyond TA's control, however Gary advised looking at what you can control, "the most common mistakes are waiting on candidates to come to you. Reach out to candidates and you have more control over the process." Many of the panel expressed concern about being too pushy and harassing candidates; however recent analytics found that candidates were actually responding to the fourth or fifth outreach, explained Amanda Gruwell, Sales Director, Hudson RPO.

It is important to keep on persevering. "Candidates want to know that you're serious. They want to know that you're committed to building a relationship with them and, I think for a lot of recruiters, they're just not used to doing that," highlighted Ken Brotherston, Managing



Director, TALiNT Partners.

Streamline your process

“Think about what you can enhance. How long is your process, are you having them jump through hoops, are they interviewing for three to four weeks? Are they spending two weeks in your database before they’re being contacted?” asked Gary. Time is critical in this battle for talent. Gary advised, “Streamline your hiring process. Candidates respond to a process that’s really tightly fit into a week”. He observed that multiple stages and large panels of interviews show a lack of cohesion. “The candidate sees that, whether it’s subconscious or conscious, they’re comparing their candidate journey to their experiences with your competitors, and if you’re going up against a competitor who has a much more streamlined hiring process, you’re going to lose”. Debra elaborated, “one of the things that can really dilute your process and increase your number of interviews is a lack of calibration of what good looks like. Take that step to calibrate this really clearly at the front end of the process.”

Involve the whole organization

Amanda highlighted “we have a client that has made it a company-wide initiative that finding top talent is their number one priority. That’s really important because everybody is on board.” The Director, TA, of the clinical trial compliance company agreed: “The challenge is trying to get our business partners to understand how competitive the market is in today’s world. We’ve given shared insights, and they have seen a couple of candidates slip through their fingers, but it’s getting the entire organization to realise that and be really nimble in the process with us.”

Utilize technology

There are so many new tools to help streamline your process and help recruiters save time, and can really help recruiter burnout. “You can only do so much. And if you can automate a lot of that heavy lifting, it’s very helpful” advised Amanda.

Enhance your EVP

“There are so many clients that we work with that you look at their career site and you pull up three

jobs, and they have three different formats with three different messages,” pointed out Gary. The consistency of your employer brand is so important and lets your particular culture shine through. “A lot of people are interested in the culture of the company because they would like to work in a company that has a smaller feel, where they feel like they can make an impact quickly” confirmed an HR consultant. “You have to shift into the candidates’ mindset. Making sure that you list out what’s in it for them and that might be things you may not even think of like free parking that may resonate,” highlighted Gary.

An HR consultant explained that they’d seen this in practice in a local firm: “People were dying to work for this company, it was crazy. They would take massive pay cuts. And they would talk about the M&Ms that were in every break room, and the cookies on Friday, and I couldn’t believe it. These people were so excited. But it was those types of things, soft things that people really appreciate and enjoy”.

Get your house in order

Think about what you can control and review your processes to compete. Twelve months ago, there were mass redundancies and now we are facing talent shortages. Things can shift rapidly. Gary summed up: “Everything that we’re talking about are things that we should already be doing, in terms of EVPs, in terms of evaluating your processes, in terms of AI. We need to be mindful, as leaders of TA, that there are some basic principles that we must continue to be on top of regardless of the market.”

“Streamline your hiring process. Candidates respond to a process that is run quickly and fits into a week”

Gary Jones, Director of Talent Acquisition
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