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REVERSE COMMUTING ON THE RISE

As home to many of the best known names in business, the Thames Valley is proving an ever-increasing attraction for many of the country's top managers and directors seeking interim management roles.

With salaries now matching London levels, highly sought after executives are choosing to “reverse commute” out of the capital, while those already living in the M4/M40/M3 corridor often prefer to work locally rather than hit the big city.

Quality of life and greater flexibility are two of the reasons behind the trend and Hayley Proctor of Windsor-based executive recruitment and interim management specialist, Archer Mathieson, believes it is one which will continue to rise. “We’re seeing an increasing number of highly-skilled people from blue chip backgrounds who live locally and are taking on interim management roles because it offers them the lifestyle they are looking for,” she said. “There will always be those who do like to be city-based – and interim roles can be perfect because some people are happy to commute for a limited period of time – but more and more candidates living in London are coming out to Thames Valley towns such as Maidenhead and Reading, because the opportunities they are being offered are superior to those elsewhere. Regional daily rates in the interim management market are replicating London figures and the best people are being snapped up because of the huge amount of expertise they can bring to projects.”

Proctor believes experienced interim managers are “worth their weight in gold” and, as the majority come from high profile roles and big corporate backgrounds, they are highly qualified and can hit the ground running the minute they go into a business. “Very often they have significant change experience,” she said. “By nature they are very strong relationship builders who can engage with teams quickly and effectively, focusing on delivering the project in hand rather than being sidetracked by more peripheral issues.” This

is especially true in niche areas which require specialist skills and experience, such as compensation and benefits, resourcing, information systems, and mergers and acquisitions, where Proctor says interim managers provide a proven track record and quickly become a valuable and cost-effective asset. “There is no substitute for someone who has ‘been there and done it’ and taking on an interim manager can pay real dividends because they have the knowledge to make projects work, while enabling permanent team members to get on with their existing roles,” she added. They can also help to pinpoint high achievers and identify the necessary actions and rewards required to ensure they stay with a business, rather than take their talent elsewhere.

Proctor says 95% of Archer Mathieson's candidates come through referral and recommendation and success rates speak for themselves as, in 2007, the consultancy was named the UK's number one interim management provider outside London, based on market share, by Executive Grapevine Interim Management.

Although many of its placements are within the Thames Valley and London region, the sheer mobility of interim managers means the consultancy is often asked to fill roles much further afield, both within the UK and internationally. Its relationship with locally-based head offices for many global giants has seen it place interim candidates in vacancies as far afield as Singapore, Sydney, Dubai and Kazakhstan. With teams specialising in both executive recruitment and interim management, Archer Mathieson has consultants across the key functions of human resources, finance, IT and procurement and supply chain.

Case Study

Jemimah Parnell, People and Property Director at mobile media company Hutchison 3G UK, has two interim managers from Archer Mathieson. A former interim herself, she understands the experience they can bring.

In the last two years, 3 has made a major investment on the retail front, opening over 300 3Stores across the country, including the takeover in October 2006 of 73 Link stores and 22 O2 stores. As a result, around 70% of 3's revenue now comes through its retail channel and Parnell says the skills provided by the interim managers have been invaluable in helping the project become such a success.

“Both were specialists in the retail sector and have been able to bring their knowledge and expertise to our team,” she said. “Interim managers are particularly valuable when you are launching a project and need people with the skills to set it up and run with it until the point where it can be handed over to someone else.” She believes it is in the provision of specialist skills, combined with project management and change management capability where interims really prove their worth. “By bringing in an interim manager, it can often improve the buy-in from the wider business because they are seen as someone who is helping to facilitate change and they are especially good at managing the expectations of the various stakeholders,” she continued. “Their level of experience and maturity means they are able to deal with any uncertainty or lack of clarity around the early stages of a project and we also find that they are quick to embrace the values and behaviour of the company they are working with.”

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