

## HIRING THE BEST: &lt;

# What Do They Want?

By Sanjay Gupta, CMA, CPA; Tanya Lee; and Kella Kicklighter

**Hiring isn't easy.** You must attract appropriate candidates, interview them, and make a selection. Then you must make an offer that's attractive enough to secure the candidate of your choice. But what do the best candidates really want? A great deal of attention has focused on what employers want in a job candidate but little on what a candidate actually wants from a company. Yet this information could be vital for finding and hiring the best candidates. It also can help make the hiring process more successful, less expensive, and less time-consuming.

Figure 1: Mean Ratings of Job Characteristics

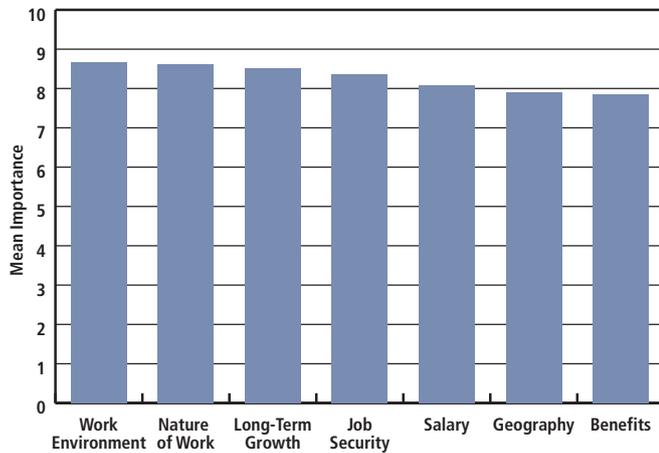
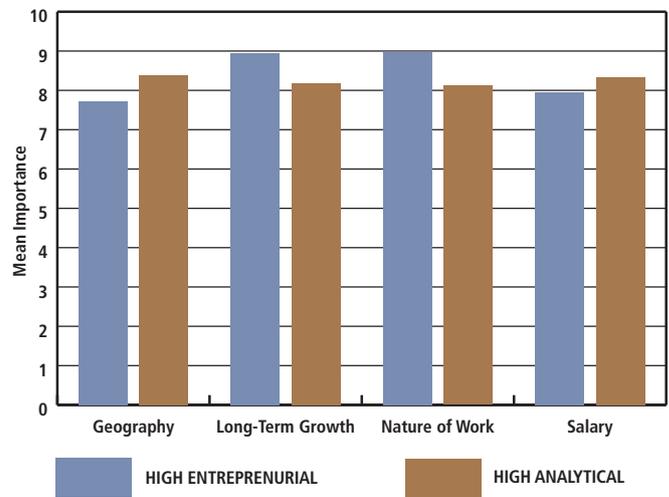


Figure 2: Importance of Job Characteristics by Personality Type



### Money Isn't Everything

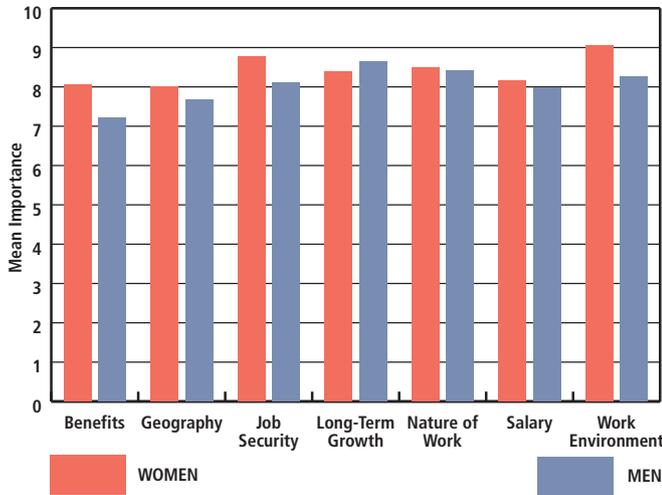
Many employers believe a good salary is the best way to attract candidates. But our survey of accounting professionals in the southeastern United States suggests otherwise. We conducted a Web search to find accounting professionals in a number of Southeast cities, including Atlanta, Macon, and Savannah, Ga., and Jacksonville, Orlando, and Tallahassee, Fla. We chose this area because we live in the region and have the greatest familiarity with the organizations and cities there. We also thought we would get a higher response rate and responses from a broader set of professionals as most would recognize our affiliations. The original sample size was approximately 1,000, and we had 164 usable responses.

We asked these professionals which job characteristics would be most important to them in looking for a job today. For them, salary appeared to be one of the least important factors in choosing a job. We also asked them basic personality questions to help us identify relationships between potentially desirable personality types and their preferred job characteristics. In the anonymous survey, we had respondents rank the importance of seven basic job characteristics using a 10-point Likert scale, where 0 was “not at all important” and 10 was “extremely important.” For the statements related to personality, 0 was “strongly disagree” and 10 was “strongly agree.”

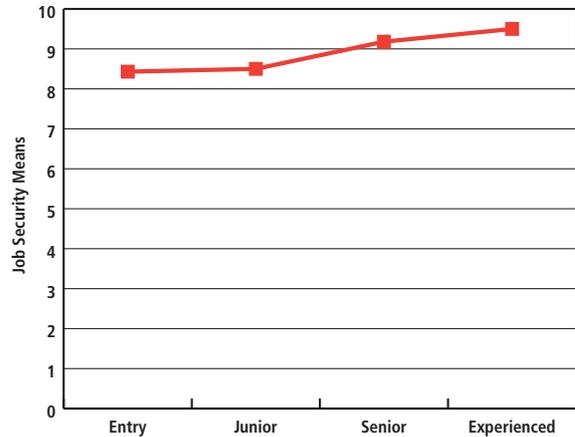
The accounting professionals rated qualitative factors as more important in job choice than quantitative factors (see Figure 1). The three factors rated as most important were work environment, nature of the work, and potential for long-term growth. All these affect how much a person enjoys his or her work, unlike extrinsic rewards of salary and benefits. The three factors rated least important were those that are easiest to quantify: salary, geography, and benefits. When we compared the average ratings of these factors to each other, we found that salary was valued significantly less than work environment, the nature of work, long-term growth opportunities, and job security. Salary essentially was rated the same as geography and benefits.

After looking at the entire group of respondents, we analyzed subsets of respondents to see if the importance placed on job characteristics differed by personality, gender, experience level, or the existence of financial dependents. We reasoned that a company may want to

**Figure 3: Importance of Job Characteristics by Gender**



**Figure 4: Job Security Means for Women by Experience Levels**



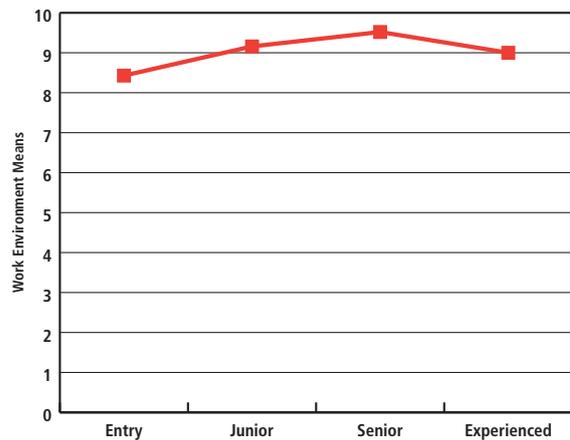
fine-tune its standard employment package to attract particular kinds of candidates. It also might emphasize certain job characteristics when announcing the position and during interviews.

### What They Really Want

When we searched the literature to determine what employers typically want in potential candidates, we found that entrepreneurial and analytical personality types stood out. So we asked respondents to indicate their agreement or disagreement with statements reflecting each of these personality types. We define the entrepreneurial personality as one who likes to try out new ideas, adapts to change quickly, and looks for opportunities to be in charge. Our definition of an analytical personality is one who likes to think in concrete terms, uses his or her reasoning to make decisions, plans in advance, and likes to be in control of a situation. If you want to attract a candidate with an entrepreneurial or analytical personality, it's important to know what job characteristics will appeal to each personality type. We designed our research to find out.

The results showed that those with an entrepreneurial personality tended to care significantly more about the nature of the work and long-term growth opportunities. To attract this kind of person, you should emphasize the job's challenging, stimulating work and its potential for long-term growth. Those with an analytical personality also care about long-term growth opportunities and the nature of the work. But geography and salary were more important to them. So if your top can-

**Figure 5: Work Environment Means for Women by Experience Levels**



didate has an analytical personality, you could appeal to him or her by stressing work location attractions, salary, the potential for long-term growth, and the nature of the work.

Also, there was significant overlap in the rating of important job characteristics by entrepreneurial and analytical personality types. About 60% of those having a high entrepreneurial score also had a high analytical score. But when we examined those who scored highly on only one personality type, those in the entrepreneurial group placed significantly higher importance on the nature of the work and long-term growth opportunities than the analytical group did (see Figure 2).

## What's Important to Women?

The accounting profession has shifted from being male dominated to being split more evenly by gender, so in interviews it's important to realize that men and women may prefer different job characteristics. Our survey respondents were divided fairly evenly between the genders for those with less than 20 years of experience. For those having more than 20 years of experience, there were significantly more men than women respondents, so we had to limit our analysis of the effects of gender on desired job characteristics to those with less than 20 years of experience. In this group, women rated the importance of all job characteristics higher than men did except for long-term growth opportunities (see Figure 3). The only significant difference was for work environment, and there were marginal differences for benefits and job security. Our results suggest that if your top candidate is a woman, you could pique her interest by emphasizing the benefits of the work environment. To demonstrate your firm's culture and the quality of its work environment, you might have the female candidate meet and talk with current employees.

## When Experience Makes a Difference

We grouped respondents by work-experience levels into entry (zero to five years), junior (six to 10 years), senior (11 to 20 years), and experienced (more than 20 years). The men who responded didn't show any significant trends across level of experience, but women accounting professionals in the senior and experienced categories ranked the importance of job security significantly higher than did entry- and junior-level women (see Figure 4). Because women entering the accounting workforce in the 1960s through the 1990s were faced with a predominantly male profession, this may well have resulted in more difficult job searches and in these professionals placing a higher value on keeping a job once they acquired it. Women entering the profession in recent years may have found it relatively easy to find a job, so perhaps they aren't as concerned with job security.

We found another significant relationship among women accounting professionals grouped by work experience (see Figure 5). Senior-level professionals (having 11 to 20 years of experience) rated work environment significantly higher than those at the entry level (working zero to five years) and experienced level (working more

than 20 years). If we don't consider the most experienced group of women and instead concentrate on the more junior groups, the relationship is a steady increase in the value placed on work environment across experience levels. Therefore, it appears that as women in our survey gain experience and professional confidence, they increasingly value the culture and flexibility of their work.

## Attracting Candidates with Dependents

We also asked survey respondents to indicate the number of people who were financially dependent on them. The data showed that if a respondent had any financial dependents, his or her desire for benefits increased significantly. There was no significant relationship between having financial dependents and the desire for job security or salary. Therefore, when trying to attract a job candidate who has dependents, benefits should be more relevant than job security or salary.

## How to Hire the Best

Whom you hire matters! Hiring is a recurring process, and the quality of your employees differentiates you from your competitors. Naturally you want to hire the best candidates to work for you. Knowing which job characteristics to emphasize during the hiring process can improve your chances of attracting the kind of candidates you want—and hiring the best ones for the job. **SF**

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