

Employment in Belarus: “If you want a top career, learn the language”

Minsk, Belarus – How easy is it to find a good specialist in Belarus? How do language skills affect salaries, and what is the demand for narrowly-focused specialists? What’s going on in the labour market? And is it true that there are more and more highly-paid vacancies? Lola Trapsh, Country Manager for Belarus at Pedersen & Partners, discusses these questions and more.



Jobs and responsibilities

An employee’s title does not always reflect the actual functions and responsibilities of the position. It is also important to remember that the higher an employee’s motivation, the more productive they will be, expanding their range of tasks.

“It’s currently trendy to talk about areas of responsibility, and not about specific duties,” says Lola Trapsh. “Vacancies no longer necessarily describe what the employee actually does – many new positions sound ordinary, but in fact involve a whole lot of individual and complex tasks that an incoming employee might not be ready for.”

According to Lola, the higher the responsibility, the more requirements are demanded of the candidate. The company intends to get the maximum benefit from its employees, and will pay what is necessary to achieve this.

“The most highly-paid positions are the top leaders who are able to make the most of our challenging market. For example, international companies always need to know for sure that they can rely on specialists to be their eyes and hands in this market.”

The Executive Search approach

“Here in Belarus, it’s not difficult to find a specialist, but it may not be immediately possible to assess their real knowledge and experience. For example, fluency in foreign languages is now an imperative requirement for candidates. As a rule, the wages of employees who have mastered foreign languages are around 30% higher than those who have not. Companies are developing, and expanding their hiring requirements as they do so.”

Lola notes that Minsk is growing exponentially, with new international offices and branches opening all the time. American, German, British and Chinese companies are represented, and communication within these offices is mainly conducted in foreign languages.

“The most popular language is always English – over the past two years, I cannot remember a single project where the English language was not required – but additional languages are always a plus. For example, German companies normally look for candidates with a good knowledge of German since it will serve as a good skill to have in the office, but English will still be stated as the primary language requirement.

We need to be very clear about this: if you want to make a career, you need to learn the language – especially when it comes to professional literature. Most professional business literature is released in English first, so it is best if you do not have to wait for it to be translated. We must understand what is relevant and useful, and keep abreast of new developments. If you need to communicate with foreign colleagues in order to acquire new experience, then of course you will need to understand them, and English is the language that any good specialist will know. And of course, in a foreign company, most of the internal information (instructions, recommendations) will be in English. Finally, our people need to get used to the fact that Belarus is now a part of the globalised business space.”

Lola emphasizes the fact that international companies have offices around the world, and this means that the lingua franca of basic communication between staff and management is always English. Moreover, the translation of specialised literature (such as marketing literature) can take from six months to a year, which in some fields means the translation will be hopelessly obsolete.

The challenges of finding a job

It's no secret that companies poach the best specialists by offering better conditions. All employers, even those at full headcount, are constantly looking for better personnel. But how easy is it to hop from one place to another in search of better bonuses, and how easy is it for an employee to "settle down"?

"There are certain challenges when a specialist decides to change companies, even for the same position. The organisational conditions and processes will be different, and any employee who changes jobs needs to understand and expect this. For example, management personnel may be used to making decisions based on submitted analytical information, but in a new workplace, the processes are arranged so that they themselves need to collect the information. In my experience, it is rare for managers to be fully content with their staff. As companies are in a constant state of growth and development, managers need to make a choice between investing in existing employees and their training, or hiring ready-to-roll professionals with real experience."

Timing

Regardless of the economic and political situation, there is always a demand for good specialists to fill highly-paid positions. However, there are a number of professions that we simply do not train for in Belarus. Are foreign hires used instead?

"The search process for a narrowly-focused position usually takes from four to six weeks. If you're competitive enough, sometimes it's easier to train an existing employee, and sometimes it's easier to "buy" and train an expert on a one- or two-year contract basis. Belarus has its own local workforce, and we find that it is not necessary to look for someone abroad. By the way, sometimes hiring a foreign employee can do the company more harm than good – Westerners have an approach to work and business that is very different from ours, and a foreign specialist will have to get used to how things are done here. Generally, the aspects that we value most in our local staff (precise task definition, comprehensive and clear planning) significantly slow the work of foreigners who are more used to working as partners – you do your job and I'll do mine, and no one interferes with each other."



[Lola Trapsh](#) is the Country Manager for Belarus at [Pedersen & Partners](#). Before joining the firm in 2010, Ms. Trapsh was the Director of another Executive Search firm in Belarus, and had built a strong career in the HR Management and Executive Search functions at various senior level positions.

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