



Restoring Business Trust and Confidence

inSeption

The Great Rehire: Finding Your Fit in Today's Clinical Research Industry

By **Danielle Starke**, inSeption Group

Candidates currently have immense power to control their career destinies by understanding what various company types seek in an employee and those companies' pain points.



The Great Rehire: Finding Your Fit in Today's Clinical Research Industry

By **Danielle Starke**, inSeption Group

The clinical research industry has evolved greatly in recent years. Changes have been prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic; the emergence of more effective decentralized clinical trial (DCT) tools and methodologies; increasing vendor competition; and plenty of work to go around. The result is a hiring market that offers job-seekers — across numerous skillsets — greater opportunity than ever to find a role, organization, and/or company culture that align with their values and ambition.

Conversely, hiring has seemingly become more challenging for employers in a market where, arguably, if an employee leaves, the organization suffers more than the individual. Accordingly, CROs and (bio)pharma organizations have pushed to improve their offerings to secure valuable talent. This manifests as large sign-on bonuses, higher-than-ex-

pected salaries (i.e., relevant to the position or the candidate's experience/expertise), attractive training or advancement opportunities, and more.

WHAT CHALLENGES CURRENTLY INFLUENCE EMPLOYERS' HIRING PRACTICES?

Because of the number of clinical trials conducted during and since the pandemic, companies also have been willing (or are forced) to settle for a partial skillset or level of experience relevant to a given role or pay range. However, that pay may be contingent on a willingness to work long hours consistently or to travel extensively. Still, that strategy can upset the rest of the company's dynamic: an employee with 10+ years' experience

at a company is unlikely to react well to the news a new hire with five years' experience makes a higher salary. Rather than feeling rewarded for having "put in their time," the more tenured employee probably will feel undervalued or unappreciated, particularly given their commitment to the company and experience handling difficult studies/sites.

Another significant post-pandemic concern is travel. A CRA may have spent years as a "road warrior," but they have become adept at performing tasks remotely in the past two years. Among such individuals, whether they have proven successful at performing their job remotely or simply prefer this new lifestyle, resistance to travel has increased. The impact can be unpacked into two parts. First, since not everybody works effectively remotely or wants to travel, for example, can employers accommodate those conflicting desires without compromising employees' output? Second, how is a sponsor to work with sites to ensure such a hybrid model will be successful for them, as well as the employee?

“

The clinical trial hiring environment is as robust and diverse as it ever has been. Savvy candidates can take advantage of widespread demand for talent by properly understanding their inherent value, advocating for their own worth, and working toward honest exchange of information — from both sides — throughout the interview and hiring process.

”

Interestingly, industry hiring practices have not evolved alongside employment perks in the effort to attract candidates. This industry always has progressed through the hiring process quickly out of a desire to sort through and find candidates with specific skillsets or knowledge, and that pressure has ratcheted up as such candidates are increasingly in demand. Truly researching and vetting a candidate is challenging at this speed and with few or no in-person meetings. The company knows the work the candidate did in their last role, as well as their areas of expertise. But when it comes to performing the role under an evolving paradigm, working with sites, being a good communicator — those skills are difficult to pick up through an interview. Still, with so many trial elements conducted remotely, that communication is even more important.

WHAT COMPANY TYPE IS A “GOOD FIT” FOR ME?

In the past, the only path forward in this industry was similar to the military: time in rank and time in service (i.e., to the company). Prior to the pandemic, a person might need to serve as a coordinator, a nurse, or a clinical trial assistant (CTA) for years before being considered for training as a CRA or a remote site monitor (RSM). As you built experience and a reputation for trustworthiness, your options would open to work at smaller biotechs or niche CROs — companies generally considered better to work for because they engage fewer sites, juggle fewer studies at once, and/or must navigate fewer sponsor personalities. That has changed based on how much more work currently is available.

The time investment to reach higher levels of pay and more diverse job opportunities has been reduced. As a result, organizations attempting to fill a clinical research role that requires protocol or people management may risk a detrimental trickle-down effect if they hire someone of insufficient experience, because that individual may not be able

to properly manage or retain the talent beneath them. Hence, employers now are more focused on finding ways in interviews to determine, even if a candidate lacks the traditionally accepted amount of experience for a role, whether they have the combination of personality, skill, and drive to fit well within the company model.

Similarly, candidates are more intensely vetting the pros and cons of working with different types of organizations, most notably large CROs or (bio)pharma companies versus smaller, emerging, or niche organizations. For example, earlier in a candidate's career, large CROs' and pharmas' extensive training programs are a huge boon to new employees, but they often are attached to a "time in service" clause to justify the company's training investment. At a small company, meanwhile, personnel resources are limited, so an employee may wear many hats and expand their skillset. For individuals with some industry experience (e.g., middle management) this can be a great opportunity.

Ultimately, how a person likes to work is a key factor affecting many of the listed pros and cons. Maybe the company has five all-hands meetings a week. Will that drive you nuts? Or maybe the job is very self-sufficient. Will you thrive with very little oversight? Are you nailed to the desk 8 hours a day, or can they accommodate days where you need to pick up the kids from school? Do you want to fly under the radar, get your work done, check in with your manager once a quarter, conduct your annual review, and leave it at that? A big CRO may be for you. Prefer development and advancement options a few years into your career? A smaller employer may make more sense.

ASK QUESTIONS AND KNOW YOUR WORTH

Many people go to interviews and ask questions they think the employer wants to hear, rather

than asking what they really want to know. That needs to change immediately because, even if it seems like a dream job, if it doesn't fit with how you like to work, it might be frustrating and/or drive you to leave. Thus, the Q&A part of an interview should be treated as an open conversation. Candidates should not be making demands, per se, but they should be clear about their own ambitions and, likewise, seek clarity from the company about its vision for the role.

Good questions for this purpose may be preceded by openness from the candidate: I really want to be here (e.g., a position or salary goal) in five years. What does your company do to help me get there? What are the expectations? Are there mentorship opportunities available or additional avenues through which I can learn, such as sitting in on meetings?

When we are young, we feel very replaceable — a warm body in the factory. We all remain replaceable, to some extent, but we hold more cards now because there is more work than there are qualified people to carry it out. So, if you leave an employer, it (likely) hurts the company more than it hurts you — especially if you are a good employee supporting other people. Remember, on paper, you've already hit the base requirements. That is why you are being interviewed. The rest of the interview is an evaluation of your soft skills (e.g., confidence and communication).

Honesty is important for a good working relationship to flourish. The employee should be honest about "I don't plan on being here in two years" or "I don't want to travel." "What does five or 10 years from now look like for me, and do you have pathways or ideas suggesting how I might achieve that?" A company with no answers to this question may only picture candidates in a narrow role, without additional potential or value.

FINAL THOUGHTS

Candidates currently have immense power to control their career destinies by understanding what various company types seek in an employee and those companies' pain points. In addition to favorable salaries and benefits, this power allows candidates to seek out a company whose culture aligns best with their personal values, as well as make reasonable requests relevant to travel, time on-site, training, and more. Personally, I believe most job satisfaction in this realm derives from who your managers are/how they work, the number of sites for which you have responsibility, and the number of days on-site.

ISG encourages this discernment because we not only value the skill and effort of employees as it serves our clients, we value the individual's fulfillment in their work. Consider that a big CRO might have an idea of where they want to put a new hire, but not the exact study, team, or manager. That is a huge disconnect. As a former manager at such a CRO, I did not get to interview

or interact with many candidates – I'd review a resume to confirm they had the experience, the minimum possible understanding of the trial, to be a technical fit. Meanwhile, at ISG, whoever will be managing candidates interviews them. It gives that interviewer an opportunity to truly understand the candidate's previous work with sites and communication skills.

In short, the clinical trial hiring environment is as robust and diverse as it ever has been. Savvy candidates can take advantage of widespread demand for talent by properly understanding their inherent value, advocating for their own worth, and working toward honest exchange of information — from both sides — throughout the interview and hiring process. To learn more, contact the author and visit inseptiongroup.com.

To learn more, call:

Joseph Arcangelo Sr.

Co-Founder and Managing Partner of

inSeption Group

Jarcangelo@inseptiongroup.com

267-498-5092

ABOUT InSEPTION GROUP

inSeption Group is a full-service, global outsourcing organization built on a foundational culture of exceptional service and quality. This culture attracts a subset of people who take a personal responsibility to deliver on what has been promised. inSeption Group's ability to custom-build teams with these experts while providing valuable continuity distinguishes our approach from traditional outsourcing options.