
THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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Help Wanted: Senior-Level Job, Junior Title, Pay

By [DANA MATTIOLI](#)

Some job hunters have been encountering a new kind of downsizing: companies that aren't eliminating positions entirely, but are combining a mid-level position with a more junior one -- then advertising it as a junior slot and offering a lower salary.

In other cases, more-senior persons are being hired, only to find that they are charged with handling both their own work and the tasks that once fell to subordinates.

Have you seen ads for low-paying jobs that require more responsibilities than their titles suggest? Have senior positions at your firm become saddled with junior-level tasks?

It's just the latest in a series of changes companies are making to adjust to a weak economy. Earlier this year, companies initiated buyouts of senior executives with big salaries. Some firms have downgraded full-time employees to part-time status, and others have adopted a consolidated workweek in an attempt to reduce office costs, says John Challenger, CEO of Chicago-based outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas.

"They're looking for people to wear multiple hats but only pay one salary," says John Robeda, a 30-year-old product manager for an agribusiness company in Colorado Springs, Colo., who has noticed the trend since he began searching for management and marketing positions in January.

The trend has also affected financial-services firms, which are increasingly combining information-technology jobs to cut costs, says Katy Winter, a permanent placement coordinator at Sapphire Technologies Inc., a global staffing firm. Many of Sapphire's clients are seeking IT developers skilled in fixed income as well as derivatives and equity-trading platforms, whereas in the past they sought candidates experienced in each of these areas for three different jobs, she says.

"They're looking for a jack of all trades," says Ms. Winter, whose clients include a number of top-tier financial-services firms.

When Two Jobs Become One

What you should do when you apply for a job you suspect used to be two jobs:

- Ask what position has been eliminated to see if you can handle all the duties.
- Know the going rates for various jobs and expertise levels, so you can negotiate a fair salary. Don't sell yourself cheap.

Recruiters say the trend is accelerating as earnings sink and companies scramble to cut costs any way they can. **"Throughout every economic downturn, there's a contraction in the U.S. economy and firms rethink how they organize themselves," says Clark Beecher, managing director of Magellan International, an executive-search firm based in Houston. "They will bring in one person to do three people's jobs and stretch their assets."**

Recruiters also say they are seeing an influx of entry- and lower-level candidates entering the marketplace, and employers are taking advantage, figuring younger workers might not notice -- or might even be grateful to take on a job with more responsibility than the typical lower-level position.

But for Walter Beaver, a 41-year-old computer-services technician from Northglenn, Colo., the disparity between job titles and responsibilities is disconcerting. Mr. Beaver, whose current employer has filed for bankruptcy, has been searching for a job since April.

He applied for a position labeled "systems administrator 1," a title that's equivalent to his current position. But once he viewed the tasks of the job, it was clear that it required someone with the skills of a mid- to senior-level administrator.

"On the listings there's a page and a half of qualifications and responsibilities for a job, and then you get to the pay and it's \$28,000 to \$32,000, and you're like, 'Are you kidding me?'" says Mr. Beaver. He says the job should have commanded a salary \$10,000 higher.

Other companies are extending the strategy to more-senior hires, bringing people on board to fill both a management role and handle support. Alister Wellesley, CEO of Manhattan-based executive-search firm Wellesley & Partners, recently placed a chief marketing officer, but said the terms of the title are different than what they would have been a year or two ago. Although he had a grandiose title, he was also expected to handle the mundane media tasks of the marketing department, he says.

Mr. Wellesley says he has also seen a trend in the past few months of executives being hired for a high-level job with a big title but then being told they can't hire a team to work for them, leaving the new executive to also handle lower-level tasks once performed by assistants and junior managers.

Hillel Tropper, executive vice president of CODA Resources, a Brooklyn-based contract manufacturing firm, recently replaced his office manager and warehouse manager with one person. He says the move saved him about \$50,000. Mr. Tropper says the new arrangement is working out nicely, but admits he checks in often with the new employee to make sure he isn't overwhelmed by the workload.

"It's a lot for one person to do, but we're pretty confident [he] can handle it," says Mr. Tropper. "So far, everything is working out well."

It's more than just small companies that are trying to capitalize on the economy by mislabeling or combining two demanding jobs, says Stephanie C. Harper, a human-resources manager at an Atlanta-based human-resources consulting firm. "When you actually read the job description or talk to the employer, they want you to move mountains," she says.

These measures may help companies cut costs today, but they tend to backfire in the long run, say human-resource experts. Having one person fill the role of two or three people risks burning them out and can also affect retention, says Jeff Wittenberg, chief leadership officer at Kaye/Bassman International, a search firm based in Plano, Texas. "If that new person decides to leave, you have to run ads, possibly engage a recruiter, offer [new employees] more money and train them," he says.

When jobs are poorly combined, the strategy can also be bad for the firm, warns Amy Armitage, a partner at Capital H Group, a human-resources consulting firm based in Chicago. "You've got to look very closely at what jobs are being cut and ensure you don't cut into the bone, into the things that are really adding value to your customers and to what's really creating the growth engine of your company," she says.

Some companies that are combining positions say the moves bring added benefits to their employees. Earlier this year, for example, Concept 1 Accessories, a New York-based manufacturer of licensed fashion, sports and entertainment accessories, consolidated five of its divisions into four to cut costs. As a result, nine positions were eliminated and their responsibilities were added onto existing roles, says Sam Hafif, chief executive officer of the 105-employee firm.

The company previously had a sales position that specialized in a retail client's apparel brand and another that managed the same client's sports brand. Now

there's just one sales job for both tasks. But Mr. Hafif says the extra work is a boon for the employees who take it on.

"The people who stayed will have a greater income because of the additional revenue that they inherit," says Mr. Hafif, explaining that workers' bonuses are tied to their division's revenues.

—Sarah E. Needleman contributed to this article.