

A black and white portrait of Linda Bialecki, an executive recruiter, smiling and sitting at a desk. She is wearing a dark, long-sleeved top. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

THRILL OF THE HUNT

I was born to be in this business," says **executive recruiter Linda Bialecki**. Seeing her comfortably perched in her 42nd-floor office, with Manhattan's rooftops spread out below, it's easy to believe that Bialecki is exactly where she wants to be—at the top of the head-hunting game.

Bialecki specializes in the investment banking industry, placing megadeal makers in jobs with salaries in the six- and seven-figure range. Unlike recruiters at some firms, who make their money on commissions, she works exclusively on retainer for a relatively small number of clients. In a typical year, she places six to eight candidates, about half the industry average.

Bialecki, now 51, was feeling "at a stall" in a bank marketing department when a former classmate at Stanford's business school gave her name to a friend starting his own search firm. She quickly discovered she had a knack. In 1986, she struck out on her own.

Successful recruiting takes more than a fat Rolodex and a persuasive phone manner. "It's less about finding bodies and more about consultation and assessment," she says. In recent years, the field has become more challenging. For one thing, both men and women are placing a higher premium on their quality of life, and sometimes a stratospheric salary isn't enough to entice them to make a switch. Bialecki spends most of her time working on the "culture fit" between a candidate and a position. And she also has to compete with the Internet: Access to on-line search sites and vast databases makes finding people a no-brainer. "We're just seeing the tip of the iceberg," Bialecki says.

The future does have an upside: In the next 10 years, the population of 30-to-50-year-olds is expected to drop. The shortage of bodies, she says, "will be great for search." —LAURA GOLDSTEIN