



Executive Search

Review

SNAPSHOT

RICHARD GROS SEES OPPORTUNITIES WITH HIS NEW EXECUTIVE SEARCH FIRM



It's been a rough period for executive recruiters but Richard Gros says the time is right for launching his own search firm. The former PepsiCo

human resource executive opened **Richard Gros & Associates** (www.richardgros.com) last August.

The Greenwich, CT-based company will recruit high-middle and senior management officers. While this is Mr. Gros' first foray as a consultant, he is no newcomer to executive recruitment. During his 25 years on the corporate side, he led some of the most significant searches in the consumer products industry both domestically and internationally.

The launch appears risky in the present hiring downturn. But Mr. Gros says slumps are a fairer gage of recruiters' prowess than boom times when customers may be less discriminating about their choice of firms. Mr. Gros says many companies are pickier these days and looking increasingly for a more personal touch and high-quality service. This provides Mr. Gros a significant competitive advantage by leveraging his client-side sensibilities. He has based his firm on three pillars; Surpassing Client Service, Innovation Solutions for Competitive Advantage and Executional Excellence. Richard Gros & Associates will limit its number of assign-

ments and charge fixed fees. In addition, a separate arm, called ReSearch, will identify companies that are off-limits for other recruiting firms and find quality candidates that might otherwise not be presented. Mr. Gros says the extensive off-limits restrictions is the No. 1 weakness of larger search firms who can't recruit from companies where they've recently placed executives. "I know full well that it is imperative to source from the largest candidate pool and that is why I am only working with a select group of clients," he says.

Former PepsiCo colleagues say Mr. Gros is tenacious and resourceful about finding quality candidates. John Pearl, a former PepsiCo senior vice president, says on one occasion in the mid 1990s, Mr. Gros plugged an important finance opening with an investment banker who lacked the heavy accounting and corporate background that PepsiCo usually sought. The former banker helped oversee a series of important acquisitions and was promoted. "Rich has a good eye for talent," says Michael Peel, SVP human resources for General Mills and a former colleague at PepsiCo.

Other senior executives praise his ability to woo candidates and pinpoint a company's hiring needs. "He was able to figure out what a company needed," says Christopher Sinclair, who worked with Mr. Gros at PepsiCo and subsequently at communications and equip-

ment leasing company Caribiner. "He did his homework."

The 49-year-old Mr. Gros received a Master's degree in personnel from New York University. In his first job after graduation, he oversaw the creation of a college recruiting program for pharmaceuticals company Pfizer. His success drew notice from a headhunter, who recruited him to PepsiCo. The soft-drink and snacks giant was then amidst a growth spurt. Mr. Gros helped fill 131 sales and marketing openings in his first nine months.

Over the next two decades, he built his global expertise by assuming several human resource posts of increasing importance including; vice president of human resources Pepsi-Cola International, senior vice president human resources of Frito-Lay Company, chief human resource officer PepsiCo Foods International, chief human resource officer Caribiner International and United Rentals. Mr. Gros also lived internationally in Montreal, Hong Kong, Singapore and Hungary. During Mr. Gros' tenure at PepsiCo, he played a critical role in building PepsiCo's leadership to "Academy level" status. Gros states "I believe that there is no greater imperative for any business than the necessity of getting the right people in the right jobs. All value creation flows from that. It's been my passion for 25 years and hopefully now with Richard Gros & Associates, I can help more companies build their organization's leadership capability."