

“Grasp the idea, see the commercial potential...”

Bio-economy Career Profile

Position: General Manager

Name: Lee Smithson

Company: The Stiller Centre

Salary Range: \$80,000 to \$100,000 per year

What I do:

I help people who have a really good science idea and need lab space or a science environment to get their business off the ground and started. I help them get to a point where it can be financed, so they can hire a business or management team.

I work in a 50,000-square-foot lab and office facility. We are a mixed-use, wet-science business incubator. We're a business incubator for start-up companies requiring specialized wet or dry lab space. Fume hoods are one of the features of our space and our tenants are monitored fairly closely under Material Safety Data Sheet (MSDS) compliance and other governmental regulations.

I travel two or three times a month, sometimes more. I do day trips to Toronto and back, network, and build up a contact base. A lot of my travel is regional with a little bit of North- American and rare international travel. Once in awhile, there's an opportunity to go to India or China but the trip must justify the reward.

What education and skills do candidates need for this position?

At a minimum, you need a science degree. Depending on the amount of business experience you've had, you may require some business training. If you're young in your career and do not have the experience, an MBA would be helpful to do this job effectively.



You need to be able to listen to people and have objectivity in evaluating a business opportunity and providing feedback, good or bad. You need a good science background, and be able to grasp technology fairly quickly based on a rudimentary description.

You require superior people skills, because you deal with people under a lot of stress who are starting up a business. You have to effectively provide feedback on their business plan, and grasp the idea quite quickly and see the commercial potential.

What are the best parts of your job?

The variety of things I get to talk about with our tenants, or people who visit to see what we do. I could be talking with someone about diabetes research, development of an AIDS vaccine, or a new energy reactor – it's pretty diverse.