

Our View from the Bridge

BLUE SKIES AHEAD FOR HIRING

Today's Job Recovery Rules have Changed Requiring Relevancy and Specificity

By Scott Kriscovich, president of TrueBridge Resources

Although recent events in Japan and the Middle East are once again creating economic uncertainty, we continue to see an improving hiring outlook for the coming months. However, the corresponding job recovery will be met with new challenges and new opportunities, including evolving ways for organization to attract top-drawer talent and for job candidates to position themselves among the burgeoning sea of applicants.

The rules have changed, making this recovery different from previous recessions—even as recent as the 2003 economic turnaround. Hiring organizations as well as job candidates will see the best results by employing a dual strategy of relevancy and specificity as a way to capitalize on the current labor market. In particular, we are seeing these three key shifts:

- Organizations are hiring those with job-ready skills
- Employees are no longer afraid to leave their current positions
- Companies and their workers are both favoring new employment options

Job-Ready Skills

Organizations are being more selective and precise about hiring candidates with specific job-ready skills. But perhaps they are a little too optimistic about the depth and breadth of the available talent pool. *The Wall Street Journal*¹ reported recently that:

Recruiters say they are having trouble finding candidates for many skilled positions, and once candidates are found, hiring managers are taking longer to pull the trigger. "Nowadays, if managers speak to a really great candidate, instead of hiring him, they take it as an indication that there must be 10 even better people out there," says Todd Safferstone, director of CLC Recruiting, a unit of the Corporate Executive Board.

The reality is that the talent pool narrows proportionately to the more requirements added to the job description. Be clear and realistic about the position's "must haves" versus "nice to haves" before the recruiting process even begins. And make the hire if someone meets your criteria as one thing hasn't changed: It is always a tight market for good candidates

For candidates to best sell themselves in this environment, they need to be prepared for this specificity. Consider this is a recent blog post by Seth Godin²: *Unskilled labor is what you call someone who merely has skills that most everyone else has. If it's not scarce, why pay extra? The unemployment rate for skilled neurosurgeons, talented database designers and motivated recombinant DNA biologists is essentially zero, despite the high pay in all three fields. Unskilled now means not-specially skilled.*

One generic cover letter is no longer suitable. Tailor your current and previous work experience to each particular job opportunity to get the attention of hiring managers today. Generic descriptors such as "proficiency in problem identification" are throw-away comments. Instead, explain as concisely as possible problems you solved in previous roles that the prospect company may also encounter.

Employee Exodus

As company executives feel more confident that the market is strengthening, they will do well to keep their eye on the back door. Employees are gaining their own confidence that will launch the mass departure and job shifting typical at the end of a recession.

BlessingWhite Research released their 2011 Employee Engagement Report³ which noted: *More employees are looking for new opportunities outside their organization than they were in 2008, suggesting that 2011 will be a challenging year for retention (and a hot market for firms looking to attract top talent).*

Both in-house and outsourced recruiting functions are being more aggressive about filling the candidate pipeline, proactively reaching out to prospective employees—particularly those currently employed—before they are pursued by competitors. The number of qualified candidates in the marketplace continues to be high, but the challenge is to identify and reach these potential employees and then properly match them with the optimal environment.

Candidates can feel more confident about the opportunities out there, but take the time to really hone in on what it is you are looking for as a professional. Again, be relevant and specific about the business industries and job levels you are pursuing and have that reflected in your networking conversations and prospect company correspondence.

New Employment Mix

While not created by this recession or even the last, the shifting workforce mix has certainly been augmented by our national and international economic affairs, as well as new technologies and demographic shifts. Organizations are under pressure to create and maintain a high functioning workforce that attracts quality talent and fulfills its business objectives, while staying flexible and cost efficient. This has come to include any number of new and traditional job designations: full-time, contract, contract-to-hire, independent consultant, contractor, freelancer, etc.

Contract talent is finding its way into every level of the organization. Research by The Human Capital Institute⁴ indicates that one-third of the U.S. work force is now composed of non-traditional “contract” workers. The pool of these workers, who often are part-time, is growing at more than twice the rate of the full-time work force.

For candidates, become familiar with the available workforce options and determine what types of positions you are willing to accept. Also, know what is available: flexibility is widespread in industries such as IT, marketing, design, social networking and writing, but it extends into every professional sector. Refine and sharpen your “elevator speeches”—yes, you need them—to offer topline information about who you are, what you do, your unique skills and value proposition. Research the organization and open position and modify your speech to address the specific needs for both and how your experience aligns with that.

Some things don't change ... good job candidates will always have opportunities. The bottom line is that the recruitment and job search environment is changing in response to the economy, technology and generational shifts. Filled with numerous qualified applicants, the employment marketplace requires relevancy and specificity in order for organizations to attract the most effective hires and for job seekers to capitalize on the opportunities becoming more available.

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1. *The Wall Street Journal*, "Jobs Open, but Filling Them Slows Down," by Joe Light, Mar. 7, 2011
2. Seth's Blog: Unskilled labor, by Seth Godin, Mar. 11, 2011
3. 2011 Employee Engagement Report, by BlessingWhite Research, Jan. 2011
4. The Human Capital Institute, "Contract Talent: Are Contractors Included in Strategic Talent Management Initiatives?" Author: Alan Mellish, Nov. 15, 2010

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