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Route to:

Five simple truths about hiring

HAS TODAY'S ECONOMY CHANGED THE RULES OF THE ROAD WHEN IT COMES TO FINDING REALLY GOOD PEOPLE?

NUMEROUS COMMENTATORS have proclaimed the current recession to be one of those game-changers that invalidates everything that everyone once thought they knew about anything.

Actually, however, the old rules continue to apply: Credit booms lead to credit busts ... supply and demand cannot long remain out of balance ... there's no such thing as a free lunch ... and a house of cards will eventually collapse.

Likewise, certain immutable forces continue to govern talent acquisition. Despite the proliferation of online job boards, corporate employment sites, human resource software, social networking sites and the like – there are few if any shortcuts to finding that needle in a haystack who will help take an organization to its next level of profit and performance. Expert assistance is still required.

Below are five simple truths about hiring that demonstrate why providers of professional employment services still play an important role in lean times as well as fat.

1. Top talent is always in short supply.

With unemployment soaring, it sounds contradictory to complain of talent shortages. But consider several facts.

To begin with, cash-strapped employers do not seek to save money by letting their best people go, nor do any employment-discrimination laws require it. One can't decide to terminate people based on age, race, gender, etc., but one can decide

to trim the rolls based upon such factors as performance, job function and seniority (generally last in, first out). In the vast majority of cases, critical people in critical positions are unlikely to be affected by corporate downsizings and are usually the object of employee-retention overtures. Unless unhappy for other reasons, they are unlikely to be actively seeking new employment.

Even if a sizeable number of highly capable individuals have joined the unemployment ranks, they are unlikely to exceed the ten percent or so of employees everywhere who can be considered top performers. The challenge remains to identify them. This past April, according to Nielsen audience research, job boards including CareerBuilder, HotJobs and Monster attracted 57 million “unique visitors” trolling for jobs – up 50 percent from a year ago. Which 5.7 million were top performers, and who has the time to find out?

Moreover, as the recession has deepened, the number of people pursuing alternatives to corporate jobs has increased. And, if the current downturn produces the same effects as prior ones, many children of displaced workers will consider alternative employment as well.

2. The cost of a bad hire exceeds the cost of a good one.

It's easy to hire the wrong person; employers do it every day.

The problem is that the costs of identifying, interviewing, hiring and training the individual eventually go for naught and must be repeated –

perhaps over and over again until the right person is finally located and agrees to come on board.

Here are some of the results of a bad hire: Work is performed poorly, productivity suffers, profits are lost and morale plummets (especially if the culprit turns out to be a poor cultural fit as well).

Here are some of the causes: The employer lacked the time and tools to identify top candidates, the candidate pool was limited to those who applied for the job (missing passive candidates who were happily employed and not seeking new employment), the recruiting and interviewing process was of low priority and/or the best candidates were not sold on the position. Professional search consultants overcome those problems every day.

3. It's difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff.

Until recently, résumés tended to suffer from job inflation – that is to say, people would overstate their capabilities and accomplishments. A growing trend, according to *The Wall Street Journal*, is job deflation – where desperate job-seekers dumb down their résumé to avoid looking over-qualified.

Executive recruiters often get to know candidates over a long period of time – having considered them for various job openings, having placed some in prior positions and having counseled more than a few on the wisdom of a particular job change. Not only do good recruiters know the candidates they present, they also know the real responsibilities of the jobs those individuals hold and the companies for which they work.

In-house recruiters often lack that kind of first-hand knowledge. Moreover, if they are relying on internal or even external databases that spit out candidates based on key-word searches and other algorithms, it becomes even harder to distinguish truth from fiction.

4. The Internet and its tools are poor judges of human character.

Job-seekers can load their résumés (or not) with the kinds of skill sets, job titles and employer names that catch the attention of enterprise software – but what do all those words tell an employer about the candidate's leadership ability, managerial acumen, emotional intelligence and communications style in dealing with other

people? Was he or she a team player who thrived on consensus-building, or did the individual prefer to reach a decision and then expect others to follow? And how closely do the person's prior accomplishments mesh with the most pressing challenges of the new job? This is the kind of information most employers would like to have before flying the candidate in from Timbuktu.

As in Sanford Rose Associates' *Dimensional Search*[®] process, expert search consultants can match a candidate's skills to job requirements, past experience to future job needs and managerial style to corporate culture. None of that needs to be left to chance.

5. Search well-done saves both time and money.

When economic times get tough, the rallying cry often becomes, "Fire the advertising agency!" or "Stop paying the recruiters!" In truth, do-it-yourself search works about as well as do-it-yourself advertising. There's a reason why professional help costs money.

But just as highly creative, well-executed advertising delivers new customers, professionally conducted executive search delivers top talent. By removing the recruiting burden from already overburdened corporate managers, it frees up time for them to pursue the business objectives of the enterprise. By knowing how to identify *and* attract the very best people (often while protecting the confidential nature of the search), search professionals earn their keep by "doing it right the first time." Employers see only well-vetted candidates, any of whom could do the job with flying colors.

Most employers will run lean operations well into the future – where every individual needs to function at peak performance. More than likely, your competitors are beginning to identify weak spots in their organizations and to hire key people who can lead them out of recession and into prosperity.

—George Snider

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