



## **A Workforce By Design Should Help Weather Any Impending Labor Storm**

By Deb Besemer

With the U.S. unemployment rate at a record low of 5 percent, according to a U.S. Department of Labor report covering May 2005, and the incidence of unfilled jobs, a labor shortage isn't just approaching, it's here. Companies around the globe are now re-evaluating their recruitment strategies to ensure they can respond to the effects of the shrinking skilled labor pool.

As with any challenge, success will belong to those who master the fundamentals, specifically the fundamentals of human resource management: Workforce planning; workforce attraction; workforce selection; hiring and onboarding; and development and mobility. Creating a "workforce by design" uses an integrated combination of technology, information and knowledge to rethink — and redesign — organizational work flows, business rules and processes to build and manage talent relationships.

### **Plan for the future or you won't get there**

Workforce planning is to human resources what strategic planning is to the entire company, and is essentially the task of forecasting an organization's future human resource requirements based on current and potential internal and external forces and market trends. If you are a vice president of HR and have been on the periphery of corporate strategic planning sessions, you must insert yourself into the planning process now.

It is particularly important that workforce planning include consideration of external factors that have an impact on the available talent pool for your organization, industry and market. Many organizations attempt to predict future talent requirements using only historic precedent. History is a good starting point, but circumstances change and you need to plan, predict (as best you can) and act, accordingly.

### **'Post and hope' method doesn't work**

Effective candidate attraction means HR professionals must be engaged in obtaining best fit candidates. Posting a position on a job board and hoping the ideal candidate finds it is no longer sufficient. Because many of the best candidates already have jobs, HR staff must learn how to create and execute passive candidate identification and marketing (recruitment) campaigns.

Organizations must also invest in their employment brand and treat it as a valuable asset. Employment brand includes everything from the job advertisement placed in a trade publication to the experience of applying for a job online. And, like your product or service brand, employment brand determines the type of "client" you'll attract.

### **It's more than just skills**

To be successful, candidate selection requires a combination of technology and human judgment, and having a talent management system with strong data mining and assessment capabilities is a critical component of the process.

When conducting assessments, be thorough and have the tools necessary to evaluate candidates on the “can do, will do, will fit” criteria, including experience, skills, competencies, background, personality, and cultural fit.

Remember, as the candidate pool shrinks, you will spend more time identifying and pursuing passive candidates. And, because passive candidates do not have the same motivations as active candidates, you will need to develop strategies to entice and engage them even after they've been selected.

### **Hiring and onboarding starts early in the process**

Because prospects and candidates form their perceptions about what it's like to work for your organization before they are hired, onboarding should begin in spirit during the selection process. Make a good impression from the outset.

Once a hire is made, onboarding activities should focus on rapidly integrating the individual into the company, optimizing their performance and raising their productivity quickly. Make sure your new hires are scheduled to meet all the key people with whom they'll be working, receive necessary training and are integrated into their team's meeting calendar, all before their first day on the job.

Administrative activities like payroll and benefits enrollment are also important components of the onboarding process and should be facilitated by online applications whenever practical. Make onboarding easy by eliminating the little glitches that can make even the most optimistic new hire question their decision to work for your organization.

### **Keep your best people**

There is some good news about the labor shortage: Your best candidates may already work for you! Therefore, sourcing internal candidates should be the first step in your recruitment hiring process. If you're unsure of your ability to manage this by yourself, seek an outside vendor that can provide the tools to help you recognize, manage and capitalize on your internal candidate pool.

Growing internal “bench strength” can lead to greater business continuity for your organization, and retaining quality employees can increase productivity, and save time and money.

To retain your existing employees, however, you need to provide them with reasons to stay that go beyond mere compensation. You must provide them with clearly defined opportunities and career paths appropriate to all stages of their career.

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