

Searching for employees – where are they?

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“We’re looking to hire a couple of good employees but are having a hard time finding people who are a fit. I hear so much about how this is a high unemployment economy, but the talent doesn’t seem to be beating a path to my door step. Any suggestions?”

You’re not the only company I’ve heard from that is looking for good talent and having trouble finding what they want. A few suggestions.

- Don’t wait until you need someone to start looking;
- Employ resources to help you look;
- Know what you want, what makes an "A" player;
- Put the word out everywhere; and
- Don’t give up.

Many companies hesitate to put the word out that they could be looking to hire, until they’re at the point of needing to hire. That stacks the deck against you. Great talent may not cross your doorstep the week you need it to do so.

You have to kiss a lot of frogs to find a prince. That line definitely applies to recruiting. Look at a lot of candidates.

Put the word out that you’re looking all the time. Let customers, employees, vendors and friends know you’re searching for talent. Don’t forget to tap into your social networks - places you frequent outside of work as well as online networks. Set up a network of contacts who will let people know you’re looking, who can vouch to candidates that your company is a good place to work.

TRACKING TALENT

Over time you want to build a rolodex of qualified talent. Keep track of the career moves of promising candidates, so you know where they are and what they’re doing when you need them. Ask past candidates and employees to let you know if they hear of anyone who might be interested.

Consider hiring an agency to help you look. While in a high unemployment economy there are lots of good people out of work, they may not be actively searching the want ads. Out-of-work people may be as frustrated at trying to find a good work environment as you are at trying to find good employees. Consider using a go-between to help you find the talent you’re looking for.

If you are going the advertising route, put out ads in many locations. And keep the ads refreshed regularly, so your information is at the top of the search lists. Having an ad appear repeatedly makes it easier for someone to find you when they’re ready to contact your firm.

Be clear what you’re looking for. The more specific you can be regarding the open position and qualifications, the more likely you will be to find a perfect match. As you get in resumes, don’t get hung up on the ones that don’t match. Many people do send out mass responses, regardless of fit. Just set aside the non-relevant resumes and focus on criteria you know is a match to your open position.

ASSESSING APPLICANTS

As you interview, ask candidates detailed questions about how much they are making and looking to make. In this economy, many people are running into a wall with compensation. Lots of people were making more money a year ago than they are likely to make now. Some candidates will re-calibrate their expectations and some won’t. Some will make temporary concessions.

Be careful to hire candidates who really want the job. Avoid the candidate who is willing to settle for now, until something better comes along. That attitude will waste your time and money, as the candidate will move on once the economy picks up.

Set a goal for the number of employees you want to interview. Expect to interview at least five to 10 candidates, and narrow that down to two or three top ones. Be prepared to negotiate with more than one candidate, so that if things fall apart with your first choice you can quickly switch gears and move forward with the second candidate.

You may find that your criteria changes as you interview. It's possible you'll learn something about the position, and people who've successfully functioned in similar positions. If your criteria changes, start the search fresh. Place new ads, define new characteristics you're looking for and start the clock over. Try to get in a flood of candidates, and then build an efficient screening process to get down to candidates who are the best fit.

Looking for a good book? Try "Stop Hiring Failures" by Steve Springer.

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