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# 904

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# YOU'RE HIRED

## Recruiting in the 21st Century's hidden job market

**R**ecruiting is the art of scouting, screening and selecting, and it's been around as long as there have been jobs. Some things never change: it's still a mating dance between workers and employers, hopefully leading to romance and marriage, with professional talent scouts as the matchmakers. But recently, the matchmakers have had to find new ways to manage a torrent of hopeful candidates.

It's not surprising to learn that The Great Recession has had a dramatic impact on recruiting. A decade ago, recruiters were huddled over elaborate plans for how to manage the critical labor shortage when the Baby Boomers finally left the workforce. There are two million fewer workers ages 16-24 in the generation following the Baby Boomers. HR professionals stayed awake at night thinking of ways to keep Boomers on the job or lure them back off the golf course when things got desperate.

Today, those plans are gathering dust on shelves all across the country; The Great Recession magically erased the worker shortage. In fact, recruiters say that they have not seen this level of available talent in their lifetimes. CSX recruiter Steve Toomey says that he has at least 25 percent more applicants for every railroad opening, many with master's degrees and years of experience in other industries. Amy Ripper, a recruiter for Winn Dixie, says that she's never seen so many candidates willing to consider retail grocery positions. At a recent job fair, over 300 applicants showed up to compete for jobs managing meat cutting and bakery departments. Ripper says it's unusual for retailers to hire people who don't grow up in the industry; Winn Dixie had to adjust its thinking about talent. "Usually, we hire people who know the business and teach them to lead; now we're hiring leadership and teaching them the grocery business."

Thom Burke was Senior Vice President of Human Resources for Adecco Group, NA (he had the same role for MPS Group before the acquisition). He worked in a global talent market for almost ten years before leaving the company in 2010. He now operates BurkeHR Partners, LLC, providing HR consulting to a variety of industries. Burke says that the surplus of talent on the market allows companies to be selective in about hires. "They can look around for someone who can do more with less, and bring more to the table." At the same time, the cost per hire is down significantly. "Companies no longer have to consider out-of-town candidates in most cases, which means no relocation costs. Signing bonuses are rare now, and candidates are definitely not bold about negotiating offers."

Burke says that 2010 was a banner year for many staffing companies. Employers are uncertain about federal policies like

health care coverage and wary of hiring before the recovery feels like a sure thing. As a result, they brought on temporary and contract workers at many times the rate of regular employees, a common pattern after a recession. Companies use their existing workforce until overtime and sheer exhaustion start to threaten productivity. Then they expand with temporary and contract workers, who may get hired on permanently. Only after these stages does a company consider creating new jobs.

Another result of the talent glut is what career coach Marilyn Feldstein calls "sending recruiting underground." Feldstein, who runs Career Choices Unlimited, helps candidates find and negotiate job offers. "In this economy," she says, "recruiters are getting an overwhelming response to job postings—hundreds of candidates for every opening. There's no way to make a serious evaluation of that many resumes. As a result, companies are simply choosing not to post the jobs." If you thought that the 'hidden job market' was a myth, it certainly isn't any longer. Recruiters and managers are reaching out to their personal and professional networks: "Does anybody know somebody with these skills?" And in this economy, somebody always does. A handful of qualified candidates referred and vouched for by trusted sources feels much more manageable to the recruiter, making your network more important than your resume (Feldstein will tell you that it always was).

Angie Tekin is in sales for Oasis Staffing and confirms that the talent surplus has been good, for client companies and recruiting firms. One big difference these days is where both groups are looking for candidates. "Our recruiters spend as much time on social media now as they do on traditional methods," Tekin says. Professional networking sites like LinkedIn offer a complete profile: history, education, credentials and even recommendations from colleagues and customers. Tekin

uses LinkedIn to look for people connected to companies she's trying to penetrate.

LinkedIn is also a great place to look for what Tekin calls "passive candidates," who are still working and not actively in the market for their next job. She says that even after this recession, employers still maintain a bias for working candidates. Fair or not, "The presumption is still that the very best employees stayed behind."

Maybe—but not for long. A 2010 Conference Board survey found that only 45 percent of U.S. workers are satisfied with their jobs, the lowest rating since the Conference Board started the measure 22 years ago. Despite their gratitude about having a job, workers report dissatisfaction with hours, pay, working conditions and rising costs of benefits like health insurance. Only 51 percent of the 5,000 workers surveyed found their jobs interesting—down from 70 percent in 1986.

Companies are also using social media to position themselves as employers of choice. CSX manager of brand communications Terri Wilsie uses the company's Facebook page to talk about quality of life as a CSX employee and discuss the application process with candidates. Winn Dixie's Amy Ripper praises social media as a low-cost tool. She also confirms that recruiting costs much less per hire these days, in part because companies that are hiring get plenty of free publicity. "That's one big way things have changed," she says. "We used to have to buy ads during the newscast; now, if we're hiring, we're the lead story." ■

*Candace Moody is VP, Communications at First Coast Workforce Development, which serves six counties in Northeast Florida.*

## DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY



A survey released in February by Forbes.com placed the River City near the top among American cities in which to work. Its survey of "Happiest U.S. Cities To Work In" put Jacksonville #3 in the country, falling behind only California cities San Jose and San Francisco.

According to Forbes, "Both cities have tech-centric economies and are regions where employees are more than satisfied with their compensation, benefits packages and work-life balance."

The survey was the work of online career site CareerBliss.com, and including its listing of the nation's top 50 cities. Eight specific factors of workplace happiness were measured, includes compensation, growth opportunities, benefits, work-life balance, career advancement, senior management, job security and employee recommendations.

"We actually found a trend that resounded through a few surprising cities, that included Jacksonville and El Paso, Texas (#7)," wrote Forbes. "These cities tended to rank high in terms of job growth opportunities, people likely to recommend their company to others and work-life balance."

The "Unhappiest U.S. Cities To Work In?" According to CareerBliss, St. Paul, Minnesota ranks #1, followed by Indianapolis at #2. The unhappiest city in Florida is Tampa, coming at #10. ■



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