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Recruitment and retention are priorities as economy slips

BY ED DUGGAN

Headhunters, HR departments, job counselors and outplacement services all agree: Recruitment and retention are likely to be the decade's most in-demand management skills.

Chalk it up to necessity and the changing patterns of employment. In 1958, the average job tenure was 23 years. Less than 40 years later, it was down to just three years as workers became more mobile and companies began to restructure, downsize and outsource.

"Times have changed and job security is under pressure," said Marko Evans, co-founder of Pompano Beach-based headhunter firm Now Hiring You.

Evans speculates that for someone entering the workforce today at age 20, he or she is likely to have eight or more jobs within the next dozen years — and as many as 20 jobs in a career lifetime.

That means firms like Evans', as well as companies across the board, have to focus on recruitment and retention like never before. The results can be the difference between success and failure.

"Recruiters are leveraging the social network sites, like YouTube, LinkedIn and Facebook, as well as job sites like Dice, Monster, and CareerBuilder," said Alex Funkhouser, president of the North Bay Village-based recruitment firm Sherlock Technology Staffing.

He said tax, audit and consulting firm KPMG held a low-cost, high-energy contest among its employees to produce videos about why it was great to work at the firm. Hundreds participated worldwide.

"The winners were judged by the number of hits and ratings they received on YouTube and other sites," Funkhouser said.



Funkhouser

"The contest took on a life of its own and resulted in a boost to recruitment — and retention — as employee morale got pumped up."

Social sites can be a double-edged-sword. Funkhouser said he trolls sites

for talent.

"It can be incredibly effective for finding candidates, just searching by company name," he noted.

Hiring and retaining qualified personnel is priority No. 1 for the West Palm beach-based Florida division of Suffolk Construction. With 260 local employees, it is the largest construction company in Palm Beach County and ranked the fourth-largest general contractor in the region South Florida Business Journal's 2008 Book of Lists.

Suffolk recently ranked 40th among Training magazine's Training Top 125 list.

It has partnered with the University of Florida to develop and deliver a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED)-accredited professional designation program, and with Florida Atlantic University for management training.

"Most building professionals know that their training really starts after they've received their four-year college degrees — and they know it will last for a lifetime," said Fred Day, director of training for Suffolk.

Day recently served as the national director for apprenticeship and training for Arlington, Va.-based Associated Builders and Contractors, a major construction industry trade organization that represents more than 25,000 contractor firms.

He sees LEED certification as vital for ambitious professionals, as many govern-

SHERLOCK TECHNOLOGY STAFFING

President: Alex Funkhouser

Web site: www.SherStaff.com

Address: 1666 Kennedy Causeway
North Bay Village, FL 33141

Phone: (305) 651-6500

E-mail: Alex@SherStaff.com

ment entities and municipalities are moving to mandatory LEED requirements.

"One of things we offer our recruits is a diversity of career paths and work types," Day said.

Career paths are broken down into project management, field superintendent and estimating. Recruits get a healthy taste of each career path during their first two years.

Work diversity is broad-brushed.

"We have opportunities in school construction, retail, high-rise offices, industrial, residential, biomedicine, research and government facilities," Day said. "Our recruits have an opportunity to learn many skills before they decide on one or more specialties."

The company also gives incentives to stay and grow: It promotes from within.

"We offer great opportunity, challenges and growth," Day said.

The future shows no signs of slowing employment changes, Now Hiring You's Marko said.

"There is a revolution raging in the world of work," he said. "It's about talent and the importance of people in the workplace."

Marko estimates that, by 2010, there could be a shortfall of as many as 5 million workers. With a labor shortage, the short job tenure will continue, with people moving from job to job.

"If someone has been at their job for 10 years, people in the future will think, 'What's wrong with that person?'" Marko said.