



Fight Brain Drain

By Angela Mihm Nigro

A new day is dawning for employers as the war for talent heats up. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that between 2006 and 2016, the number of young workers will decline, and the number of workers ages 25 to 54 will rise only slightly. By 2016, 6.1 percent of the labor force will be workers over 65, nearly double their current share. The dire combination of shortage and aging means employers must begin not only to recruit young graduates, but retain top talent as well.

Employer, know thyself

To catch the eye of today's young generation of potential employees, companies need to systematically authenticate and validate their brand, explains **George Blomgren**, recruiting solutions director, **MRA, The Management Association**.

Employers need to recognize that everything they do (and don't do) creates the big picture of who the organization is, Blomgren emphasizes this is key to the younger generation. After all, this generation seeks meaningful work, organizational fit and interpersonal workplace connectivity.

Employer branding, a careful, authentic construction of what the organization is on every level, is one step. At **Whyte Hirschboeck Dudek**, the firm's diversity initiative shows an authentic commitment. While the hiring aspect is important to gain a diverse mix of talent, says **Michael Moore**, recruiting and integration director, the commitment extends to their supplier base, client base and vendors, ensuring an overall richness and demonstration of organizational culture in practice.

Branding is also subtle, Blomgren explains.

"It includes what current and past employees are saying about you," as well as the impression anyone who has been through your "hiring machinery" has of your organization. Think of that pool of people and then consider if they are sending the message you want about your organization. If not, it is time to work on changing impressions.

When Moore gets ready to hit college recruiting events, he interviews the previous year's hires to find out why the candidates selected their firm. The interviews affirm the work the firm is doing to provide a culture of retention. This step, although simple, is an excellent way for employers to discover the impressions of current employees.

To keep former employees in the fold, many organizations have begun calling them "alumni," says Blomgren, complete with alumni events, newsletters for connectivity and a focus on keeping the relationship positive.

Don't just pick me, keep me

The work-life balance has long been discussed but never before have there been three distinct generations in the workplace, all demanding balance at the same time. While the reasons differ from boomer to Generation Y, one thing is clear: A flexible, accommodating schedule is paramount.

Moore points to his own office where a U.S. Olympic soccer coach, someone writing a book and parents looking to be more involved at home all desire flexibility. It has long been the organization's culture to balance requests, but Moore says technology requisites like BlackBerrys, remote access and laptops ensure that "it is not about the

physical presence in the office."

In order to re-attract or retain baby boomers, Blomgren says that employers must be prepared to offer appropriate, customized packages to keep boomers interested.

Even in our economic downturn, WHD labor and employment attorney **Frank Gummia** says that he sees employers thinking about their needs five years from now rather than just slashing employee rolls.

Companies, he says, are asking, "how can we restructure to afford our talent rather than cut?" It is a lesson learned over time that when a company is ready to attract talent, the talent is not there because the company has developed a reputation for cutting, hiring freezes or poor employment practices.

Smart recruiting

Today, it seems everyone is suffering from Internet fatigue, says Blomgren. From employers to job seekers, we're numb with the dearth of listings and job boards. Making it worse, many companies, he says, "seem to have forgotten what they have to offer" and therefore don't stand out from the crowd.

Many listings are a confused jumble of the job description and an advertisement when really the objective should be to get people excited about the job and your company. A good posting, Blomgren explains, should address two key points: "What is the job?" and "Tell me about your organization."

Finally, both Blomgren and Moore point to corporate Web sites as recruiting tools often overlooked by employers. Both experts say this is a key link in the chain of employer branding and authenticity.

"Make sure it is up to speed and makes the right first impression," says Moore. ■