

And Now, the Challenges of the Recovery

When the economy rebounds — as it ultimately will — HR professionals will find themselves faced with new challenges: Competing for scarce staff, filling holes left by retiring baby boomers, and meeting staffing and training demands generated by new services, innovation and reopened global markets.

In fact, the economy may already be showing signs of life. According to a survey from CareerBuilder.com and Robert Half International, 53% of employers plan to beef up full-time staff in the next year and 40% plan to hire contract or temporary workers.

Ironically, HR departments, having just finished trying to cope with recession problems, now need to prepare for the impact of *not* being in a recession.

Keep Dialog Open

One danger of increased jobs available in a recovery is losing key employees. One way to deter job-hopping is by keeping the dialogue open, “even over-communicating, with employees,” says Cindy Lubitz, managing partner of inTalent Consulting, in Atlanta. Companies temporarily unable to reward employees with pay or promotions, she says, might consider moving staff laterally for career development and growth opportunities.

Monitor Morale

Another “must,” according to Kevin Sheridan, CEO of HR Solutions, in Chicago, is for HR professionals to consistently monitor staff for morale problems, and strive to engage their workforce. Right now, he says, disengaged and unhappy employees have only limited job-transition choices, so few are willing to voice their frustrations. However, when the job market picks up

again, these employees will have ample opportunities for employment elsewhere. In fact, he says, “I would not be surprised to see organizations experience a spike in turnover as unhappy employees finally act on their overall dissatisfaction by moving to a new position when things start opening up.”

What to do?

Chris Doherty, VP at TAPFIN Process Solutions, in Houston, recommends that HR professionals focus on creating or updating their company’s workforce plan to identify staffing gaps. In order to cut costs, employees may have been laid off or moved to other departments, and new hires may have been put on hold. Where have holes been left in the workforce?

Developing a Talent Strategy

Then, to avoid losing the talent you depend on when a recovery occurs, you should develop a “talent strategy.”

Even when a tightened economy doesn’t let you provide the usual financial incentives, there are things you can do to keep quality people from being ready to bolt when they can. Some points to remember:

- What has kept employees happy in the past might not suffice any more.
- Skills can be transferred within the organization to improve current workforce performance.
- Look for the best mix of resources for your organization. Consider outsourcing where it makes sense.

Evaluate your HR department

Before looking at the rest of the organization, look inward first, at your own HR structure.

- Is the right structure in place, with the right skills and the right resources?

- Should you refine your staffing plan or recruiting model?

Anticipate Attrition

Prior to the recession, you expected boomers to start retiring and millennials to frequently move around. That may still be true in a recovery.

You may also see that those who stuck around through the hard times are now ready to move on. Other employers are on the hunt for good talent, too. Make sure you know who your A players are. Assume they will be recruiting targets and manage them accordingly.

To drive retention and keep employees and managers meaningfully engaged, initiate ongoing career conversations now to let them know you care.

In other words, give employees and managers a reason to stay around. ▲

Onboard Temporary Workers, Too

Temporary workers can be real productivity boosters, but, like permanent staff, need key information before they can be most efficient.

Make sure they:

- Know whom to report to.
 - Are familiar with company rules and policies.
 - Have adequate supplies.
 - Know what’s expected of them.
- And don’t forget to introduce them on Day 1 to everyone they’ll be working with.

The rewards of effective onboarding are multiplied every day with every employee, temporary or permanent, in your organization.

For More Information:

Employee Engagement and Commitment: A guide to understanding, measuring and increasing engagement in your organization (SHRM)

<http://www.shrm.org/about/foundation/research/Documents/1006EmployeeEngagementOnlineReport.pdf>

Employee Engagement: The Key to Realizing Competitive Advantage (DDI)

http://www.ddiworld.com/pdf/ddi_employeeengagement_mg.pdf

Employee Engagement best practices blog

<http://blog.winningworkplaces.org/blog/employee-engagement-best-practices>