



OPERATIONS

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Navigating the Talent Crunch

Employers who set themselves apart from the pack will have no trouble attracting and retaining staff

In June Toronto-based Manpower Canada released the results of its latest quarterly Manpower Employment Outlook Survey. How does Canada's hiring climate look for the third quarter? Out of 1,700 employers, 35 per cent expect to hire new staff while six per cent expect to cut back. In other results, 57 per cent of employers expect no changes in their hiring practices, and two per cent are unsure. In all, the Net Employment Outlook, with seasonal variations removed, sits at 19 per cent – a two-percentage point decrease from the previous quarter.

So as far as hiring goes, the climate still seems fairly healthy. But there's a flipside. According to another Manpower survey, employers who do want to hire may be up against a dwindling pool of suitable candidates from which to choose. It's what Manpower calls the talent crunch, and according to the survey companies are experiencing it worldwide.

The results of the Manpower Talent Shortage Survey were released in late February. Manpower surveyed 33,000 employers across 23 countries and territories to determine how talent shortages are affecting today's labour markets. Of the 1,000 employers surveyed in Canada, 60 per cent say they are having difficulty filling positions. Worldwide, 40 per cent of employers are having difficulty filling positions.

What does this news mean to food industry employers? It means they're going to have to take a different approach when it comes to attracting and retaining employees. When it comes right down to it, says Lori Rogers, vice-president of Operations at Toronto-based Manpower Canada, compensation won't matter if employers aren't offering retraining and other opportunities for employees to grow within the organization. "The next employer is going to be offering that and [employees] are simply going to jump employers," says Rogers.

Cambridge, Ont.-based Cambridge Fine Foods had some difficulty finding people who were the right fit for the company. According to president Pieter de Jonge, Cambridge used an in-house team of employees to interview candidates "because we are a small company. We have to work very closely with one another and quite often will cover for each

other during holidays. Given this, it was important that we selected individuals who we all felt would be best for the company."

On the plant side, finding employees isn't generally as difficult. "Usually we put a sign [up] and right away we have 50 to 60 applications," says de Jonge. The quality isn't always what the company hopes for, however, and often after filtering through applications it might hire 20 people during a busy period, and maybe two or three of those will stay on permanently.

As far as incentives go, de Jonge says that because he can't afford to pay the big salaries larger employers may offer, he strives to create a work environment "where people feel more willing to work for me simply because it's a better environment." For instance, de Jonge gives employees more decision-making power and pays them more for this. But at the same time his expectations are higher, too. "It gives them an incentive and they feel more a part of the process," he says.

De Jonge walks through the plant regularly to talk to and "get to know employees on a more personal level." The company also organizes social events such as a staff picnic, and in-plant contests and awards. In addition, employees are reimbursed for any courses they take that are directly related to their jobs. "I really encourage that actually," he says. "That's one of the incentives I try to get out there. If you educate yourself and it helps me I'm all for it."

Rogers adds that these days, employees should also be taking control of their career paths and upgrading their skills to stay current. On the employer side the big winners will be those companies that offer an environment in which employees can do just that. Employers, she says, should also keep in mind that today's younger hires are increasingly looking for work-life balance solutions and opportunities to move up in their careers. "Employers who want to hire or who have that generation within their environment need to make sure they're offering mentoring programs and opportunities for career mapping and making sure employees are on a track, a career path within their organization," she says. "If there's no place to go in your company, they're not going to come to your organization."

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