

# Gain Competitive Edge in Tight Job Market

Whether it is an employers' or employees' market, there is always competition for the best people. In a tight labor market, it is even more critical to have a candidate-friendly hiring process.

BY LINDA KATZ

SHE WAS THE PERFECT CANDIDATE FOR an ideal job. Despite the fact she was happy where she was working, the Houston attorney listened when a position became available that would advance her career. She submitted her resume, gave an exceptional interview and was assured a follow-up call within a few days. Weeks passed without word from the hiring company. The perfect candidate grew discouraged and when the company finally did call, it was too late. Her interest had waned.

The hiring process can make the difference in getting top employees. While the economy may be receding in other parts of the country, the job market is robust in Houston for most sectors. Demand is especially high for legal professionals in practice areas such as transactions, corporate, intellectual property, and energy. In addition, many of Houston's top employers are bracing for large numbers of baby boomer employees becoming eligible for retirement. Whether it is an employers' or employees' market, there is always competition for the best people. In a tight labor market, it is even more critical to have a candidate-friendly hiring process.

## Boom and Bust Economic Cycles

DUE TO BOOM AND BUST ECONOMIC cycles, often there is either a glut or dearth of qualified candidates. It takes years to train new generations of workers and the last energy bust resulted

in lost opportunities to develop several generations of qualified professionals. Now in these boom times, Houston has a shortage of experienced candidates.

## Competing for Best Hires

THERE IS NO QUICK FIX TO EXPANDING the candidate pool. In the case of transactional and corporate lawyers, large law firms are the best training grounds. However, becoming a partner is no longer the primary goal for many of today's lawyers, who instead seek a more balanced lifestyle and head for in-house positions as soon as they can. Hence, virtually every large Houston law firm has a standing order for lawyers with two to four years of experience in transactions and corporate law.

Likewise, in the oil and gas industry, there just aren't enough experienced lawyers to go around and most organizations don't have the time and resources to bring in untrained lawyers.

## Distinguish Through Process

THERE ARE OPPORTUNITIES TO HIRE THE best employees in a tight labor market by distinguishing a company from its competitors throughout every step of the hiring process. Being recruited is the first opportunity a candidate has to get to know the company and to see how it operates. Whether the candidate is hired or not, the process should show that the company is responsive and respects the dignity of the individual who has made

himself vulnerable to the company's scrutiny. Here are four key hiring tips to improve the process:

**1. Speed wins.** Candidates in tight markets often come to the recruiting process reluctantly. They may already be in well-paying jobs with fulfilling responsibilities and getting them to submit a resume can be a great accomplishment. Companies that respond quickly (within 48 hours after each step in the hiring process) are more likely to be successful because they demonstrate a high level of professionalism and show respect for the candidate. Alternatively, a long hiring process sends the message that the hiring company may not be well organized, or is too bureaucratic, implying that other areas of operations are equally unorganized or bureaucratic (e.g., making important project decisions and taking care of issues that can decrease productivity). Going silent makes candidates feel unimportant and interchangeable. If there are steps in the process that become unavoidably stalled, communicate the reason to the candidate.

**2. Show the love.** Recruiting is a courtship and it is particularly important in a tight market to "romance" the candidate. Everyone is flattered by attention shown to them. Go the extra mile to show interest in having the candidate join the organization. Make plans for lunch, dinner or an event, and

# Top Four Hiring Tips

Having the right hiring process in place – regardless of market conditions – before beginning a candidate search can distinguish companies and provide the advantage needed in a tight market. Companies can differentiate themselves from their competition by using these four important steps:

**1** Keep the process moving to gain respect and demonstrate professionalism. Silent and mysterious doesn't work in dating or recruiting either. Impose a 48-hour turn-around policy with every step in the hiring process. 'You snooze, you lose' is especially true in tight markets. If there are delays in making the offer, stay in touch so that candidates are aware the company is still interested.

**2** Show the love by "romancing" potential new hires. Take candidates to lunch and get to know them better. Bring them back for meetings with prospective colleagues so they will get a good feel for the organization.

**3** Don't play cheap with highly desired candidates. Make a great offer before they ask (good compensation, vacations, benefits, perks, etc.)

**4** Make sure HR and hiring managers coordinate to avoid delays. The best candidates won't wait around for employers to get organized.

arrange for the candidate to meet other people in the department to hopefully bond with prospective colleagues.

### **3. Don't nickel and dime offers.**

No one wants to hire a candidate who simply wants to make a move for more money. However, an employer can make a strong statement of interest through the compensation and benefits package offered. A Houston employer recently offered \$2,000 more than the candidate asked in base salary just to make a statement about how much the firm wanted the candidate. Don't wait for the candidate to ask for lateral vacation credit. An employees' market is not the time to negotiate. Make the best offer at the outset to reinforce how much the candidate is wanted.

### **4. Make sure the HR department and hiring managers agree on the process and follow it.**

When hiring managers and HR professionals communicate well and have a process both agree to follow,

candidates can be sourced, interviewed and hired more efficiently. Unfortunately, corporate red tape, overstressed HR departments and turf battles between hiring managers and HR can result in road blocks to successful hiring practices. To the extent possible, shield the candidate from the bureaucracy.

Remember, companies that have a timely, organized and responsive process have a competitive advantage in hiring the best employees. ■

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## About Pye Legal Group

Pye Legal Group recruits legal professionals, from permanent and contract attorneys to paralegals and administrators, for positions within corporate legal departments and law firms. As experienced recruiters, many with backgrounds and degrees in the legal field, the Pye Legal Group works collaboratively as a team to contribute ideas and resources to every search. The firm has offices in Houston and Dallas, and serves clients throughout Texas to place the right candidates in legal offices both within the state and nationwide. To learn more, visit [www.pyelegalgroup.com](http://www.pyelegalgroup.com).

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