

RESTRUCTURING THE JOB MARKET

Why are schools struggling to hire exceptional talent when candidates should be available?

By Vincent Scaramuzzo, Ed-Exec Inc.

It is easy to see how one would assume hiring would be a breeze in 2014. It is the most common question I have been asked over the past year: "How is all the downsizing affecting talent acquisition in the sector?" People truly are perplexed at how hard it is to find exceptional and passionate school leaders among the turmoil.

Last year, when career college parent company Apollo Group announced it was going to downsize 800 employees and close 115 campus locations, my email and phone lines lit up. The writing must have been on the wall weeks prior, though, as individuals who wouldn't even consider other opportunities in the past suddenly wanted to be our best friends. This followed an earlier round of layoffs paralleling similar cuts by Kaplan and Education Management Corporation.

Another shot to the sector came right after the last presidential election as Career Education Corporation announced it would close 23 campuses and cut 900 jobs. Then, Strayer University announced it would close campuses, and most recently, Corinthian Colleges is rumored to have made a significant reduction in force. This doesn't include other smaller "restructurings" that have taken place nationwide.

Normally, if any sector had this much downsizing or RIF (reduction in force), as it is now called, it might mean it was time for recruiters like me to do a little traveling, work on our golf game and return a year from now when the smoke clears. Just ask any IT recruiter who got fat during the IT boom only to starve immediately after Y2K and 9/11. But, oddly enough, the exact opposite has been true.

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I thought it was a fluke or just a little luck at first, but then I started talking to a few other firms we know and respect, and they reported the same: Business was good. So why is it so hard to fill positions if so many candidates should be available?

Some people are leaving the sector. But why?

- Individuals are frustrated with the idiosyncrasies of the sector. While certainly not the case at every school, some employees only feel as good as their last start.
- They have lost faith in the stability of the sector and fear another position might end in similar fashion.
- The work/life balance is difficult. This is by far the biggest complaint my recruiters hear every day – and a nationwide trend in general. People want more than just work in their lives.

Finally, people seem to be departing the education sector because they can. The job economy continues to make steady improvement. National unemployment is hovering just under 7 percent right now. For those over the age of 25 with a completed Bachelor's degree, that rate drops to well under 4 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. There are a lot of jobs out there for qualified candidates leaving our sector, and these candidates perceive that other industries might offer better stability or provide stronger opportunities right now.

It appears those recently RIF'ed are following Bob Marley's words:

*Open your eyes and look within;
are you satisfied with the life you're living?*

A COO I know likes the saying "Rightsizing is right, for whomever is left." But there are not many left – and that has made the demand for administrators who can succeed in good climates and bad, running schools the "right way," stronger than ever.



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