Everyone we know who is seriously trying to grow their company is handicapped by the shortage of good people. As the economy grows this situation gets even more acute. Yet hiring skills are often the weakest among line managers and CEOs who actually perform the critical interviews that lead to hiring decisions.

Often there is not even sufficient effort spent to quantify what kind of work is really being done, what skills are needed to succeed, and how to attract the best people. In this last area, it seems that CEOs often overlook the old cliché that says, “If you keep doing what you’ve been doing, you’ll keep getting the same results.”

A tight labor market, especially challenging in high skill positions and fast growing industries, requires new ways to attract people before they decide to work for someone else (like your competitor).

OK, smart guy, so how do you hire better people?

I’m glad you asked...

One way is to give prospective employees what they want from a job, and to announce clearly what you offer in your help wanted advertising, instead of following the traditional method of simply listing what you want from them.

Many too managers seem to think their ads need only announce the availability of work at their address, and then stand back for the flood of applicants. Well, that may be true if you’re hiring for people to keep the temperature down in the heating season. But if you really want to hire top notch people, you need to remember this: the word “advertising” means more than just announcing the availability of something you are selling – in this case a job. It also means enticing the “buyer” to want to buy it.

In our example the buyer is the prospective employee, or more particularly the exceptional individual who will be outstandingly successful in the position. Forget the traditional thinking that you are the buyer and the applicant is the seller. This is increasingly a seller’s market, which means the roles are reversed. You must sell good people on considering your company, not simply reject the unacceptable applicants, in order to get the people you need to grow.

If you accept that idea, then the next question becomes: what are some good selling tools to use?

We like some of the ideas that came out of a McKinsey & Co. report a few years ago, which said that certain kinds of people are attracted by certain kinds of recruiting campaigns and that there are four kinds of messages that the best people respond to:

- Big risk, big reward.
- Save the world.
- Or... Mission.
- Lifestyle.

People drawn to this message seek companies that offer them more flexibility and better lifestyle benefits, such as a good location where size enables a company to offer more responsibility and bigger budgets at younger ages.

“Go with a winner.” For people who want a high performing company offering lots of advancement opportunities. This is the typical attraction of the big company, where size enables a company to offer more responsibility and bigger budgets at younger ages.

Because managers can no longer afford to be beach-financial.

But if you can bring your vision/mission statement into the workplace, you may need to start with a strategic redirection of your company.

One final thought: Look for chemist or biotech companies. Today’s younger generations are challenged to do exceptionally well or to leave. This is the classic startup attraction, and you probably don’t have to tell these folks about the rewards of connecting with the next tech home run – you just have to convince them that you have a shot at it.

This attra...