

Post-Crash Prosperity

Negotiating this brave new world.

By Lisa Maxwell

“Post-crash prosperity” is how Richard Florida characterizes the era following the recent Great Recession that claimed 8.5 million jobs. Prosperity is defined as success, good fortune, or wealth. It’s a word that often conjures up images of money. But did you know that money is only a part of what it means to be prosperous?

Prosperity is inclusive of your state-of-mind, your health, and your finances. In the sci-fi novel, *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley’s setting and characters express the fear of losing individual identity in the fast-paced world of the future. Just as the Industrial Revolution transformed the world and the individual lives of people in the 20th century with mass production and worldwide distribution of goods, the Information Age of the 21st century brings its own personal, economic, and cultural upheavals. So what are the lessons learned from the Great Recession for human resources organizations aimed at top-level recruitment, and where do we go from here?

2011 is predicted to usher in a healthier economic environment than we have seen in years, though job creation, while on the upswing, will remain gradual. The U.S. Labor Department reports that in January employers added 36,000 jobs, and according to The Conference Board 4.3 million job openings were advertised in January. That’s 16 percent more than a year ago, but there were about four unemployed people for every job opening posted in December. Harris Interactive® conducted a late autumn survey of more than 2,400 hiring managers and human resource professionals and found that employers planned to add full-time, permanent employees to their rosters in 2011. Steady but cautious gains in high-level executive employment are evident across various industries including healthcare, information technology, agribusiness, and environmental policy.

While these overall numbers suggest increasing financial stability, adding state-of-mind and health to the “prosperity” equation enables us to bravely envision the larger cultural and social shifts of the 21st century.

A paradigm shift in state-of-mind is necessary for executives who aim to recruit highly qualified candidates for senior positions and more technical positions. While social media tools such as LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook are relatively new, in the accelerated world of recruitment they are already has-beens. For some companies, it can be tempting to think social media tools are enough to enable their internal HR staff to recruit senior executives and high caliber talent, and in some cases this might be true. However, to cast the wider net that will reach potential high-level executive hires, companies that wish to separate themselves from their competitors outsource recruitment. Plus, with increasing awareness of individuals’ demands for protection and privacy of their data online, and with increasing laws limiting the use of the internet to probe into an individual’s private data that has nothing to do with the individual’s ability to do the job, the best third-party recruitment agencies have the

wherewithal to focus beyond mainstream social media to find the best candidates for their clients.

Just as an overall state-of-mind serves to define the prosperity of an organization, so does the general health of an organization. While some companies are settling for less-than-perfect candidates, others are taking advantage of the competitive edge that outsourced recruitment agencies can provide. Executives had time to reflect on the health of their organizations during the Great Recession and to ponder questions such as: How can we trim labor costs whenever and wherever we can? How can we more effectively and efficiently hire the best and the brightest?

While these overall numbers suggest increasing financial stability, adding state-of-mind and health to the “prosperity” equation enables us to bravely envision the larger cultural and social shifts of the 21st century.

Often, companies had to make difficult decisions in laying off employees, and they were reminded that letting an employee go is a big expense. As a result, the brave new world of high-level recruiting is a world where companies take their time and demand due diligence in the screening processes, including multiple interviews and a thorough investigation of all of the potential employee’s references. While the demand for a highly skilled workforce remains high, recruiting and retaining the best and the brightest is challenging. For example, Ernst & Young reported it typically receives only 10 resumes a week for a position that requires an advanced degree, and of those 10 only a few typically meet qualifications.

The recruitment industry has remained busier than ever in this “post-crash prosperity” era. The paradox of this brave new world is that while companies might think they have their pick of the best and brightest, they would do well to realize that good talent is hard to find in any economy. Moreover, recruiting is expensive and there is no such thing as a perfect fit; the trick is to hire the person who is willing to grow and continuously accommodate the businesses’ demands, while simultaneously demonstrating creativity and innovation.

Lisa Maxwell is the founder and managing partner for Gerard Stewart, an executive search firm specializing in HRO. She can be reached at 404-250-3204 or lisa.maxwell@gerardstewart.com.

