

LOOK AHEAD

Career horizon bright for 2008

Record hiring demand, stronger loonie, employers paying more heed to worker needs among year's trends

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The Canadian career horizon is looking particularly bright at the start of 2008, experts say.

Recruiters and employers are reporting record hiring demand, which could give workers great latitude in setting their own career course over the next year.

Surveys show that average wages are on the rise, and the loonies you're getting paid are worth more on exchange markets than they have been in a generation, so no need to envy those folks south of the border who get paid in greenbacks.

And with the talent shortage ever looming, more employers are paying more heed to the needs of stressed-out and aging workers.

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The picture should remain rosy throughout the year, the experts say – as long as you keep an eye on those ominous economic storm clouds gathering south of the border.

There are also industries you may want to steer clear of, such as auto manufacturing and other businesses dependent on exporting goods priced in suddenly more expensive Canadian dollars.

No matter what, it will remain as important as ever to keep up your network and stay current with the technical skills to keep moving ahead in an ever-changing and global job market.

Here are trends the experts say you should work to your advantage in the coming year:

THE BIG PICTURE

"Canada will be a great place for career growth this year," predicts executive coach Tim Cork, president of career transition company NexCareer Inc. in Toronto and author of the career advice book *Tapping the Iceberg*.

"Because it is tough for employers to fill all their needs, many job candidates will be seeing multiple offers, and those who want to switch jobs may find employers are willing to make a counteroffer to get talent to stay with them," he says.

This is particularly true in executive positions in engineering and finance and accounting.

Over all, 46 per cent of employers plan to boost the number of full-time permanent employees in 2008, according to a new survey of 281 hiring managers and human resources professionals by CareerBuilder.ca. That's an increase from 42 per cent when the question was asked a year ago. Professional and technical staff, administrative and clerical workers will be in high demand, the survey found.

Another survey of 1,700 employers by Manpower Canada Inc. in December found that 16 per cent plan to increase their hiring over the next three months, compared with 10 per cent looking to trim staff. The remainder said they plan to maintain current staff levels.

Manpower also points out that, for the past four months, employment growth has been stronger than predicted, particularly in Western Canada.

In management ranks, Canadian recruiting firms are reporting 20- to 30-per cent increases in the number of executive searches for client companies, reaching record figures, according to a survey last month of major search firms by Mandrake Management Consultants Corp. in Toronto

"In Canada, demand for talent is high and is likely to remain stable for the foreseeable future," says Jeff Rosin, managing director for Canada of executive recruiter Korn/Ferry International.

But his prediction comes with a caveat.

"Everyone is obviously watching the subprime loan market in the United States, and how the strong Canadian dollar will affect exports. The high dollar is making Canada's exports less affordable, and there is the potential for an economic slowdown if credit is squeezed as a spillover of the U.S. housing slump," he warns.

Some sectors are already hitting turbulence. With the loonie on par with the U.S. dollar, manufactured goods from Canada are less competitive on world markets and there has already been heavy job cutting in the auto industry.

Service jobs that can be outsourced to places with lower labour costs are also going to be at high risk this year, Mr. Rosin adds.

In most other sectors, though, employees are in the driver's seat. And that means:

OLDER WORKERS GAIN CLOUT

If you're nearing retirement age, you should think twice about leaving the work force, Mr. Cork advises.

There are more baby boomers contemplating retirement this year than there are young people coming in to replace them, he explains. This will make employers anxious to provide incentives to keep experienced employees, he says.

Indeed, CareerBuilder's survey also finds that 23 per cent of employers say they're likely to provide incentives for workers at or approaching retirement age to stay on longer, and 22 per cent say they are likely to hire on people who have retired from other companies.

Mr. Cork predicts employers will give consideration as never before to partial retirement, flexible work hours, telecommuting or consulting on contract to keep around people with needed skills.

BE TECH SAVVY

And when it comes to the job hunt, technology – from on-line networking to video résumés and blogs – will continue to play an ever increasing role, says career coach Sharon Graham, president of Graham Management Group in Toronto and author of *Best Canadian Résumés*.

That makes it vital to learn how to use these web-based tools to your advantage, Ms. Graham says.

The CareerBuilder.ca survey found 12 per cent of employers say they always use on-line search engines and social networking sites to research job candidates and another 32 per cent report they do so on occasion. But 19 per cent said they plan to start or increase doing on-line candidate research in the coming year.

Because of that, it would be a good idea to post a strong biography on a personal website as well as on social networking sites such as LinkedIn.com and Facebook, Ms. Graham suggests.

Video résumés will also become more important in job searches this year as a tool for recruiters to present candidates to prospective employers, so it will be important to work on being photogenic, Ms. Graham.

NEW CAREER PATHS

A number of career paths that were unknown just a couple of years ago are emerging this year as specialties destined to grow in demand, predicts Anita Shilton, dean of the Chang School of Business at Ryerson University.

Among them, she cites:

Green is golden. The concern over environmental protection and reducing waste and emissions is spawning new ecological specialties in engineering, biology, energy and transportation.

Food sustainability and safety. As environmental concerns grow and farmland continues to be developed, specialties are emerging in ensuring agricultural productivity and food safety and quality.

Legacy systems. Many of the technologists who created the vast mainframe computer networks that banks, brokerages, insurance companies and governments depend on are retiring. That is creating a niche for specialists who can upgrade and manage these so-called "legacy" systems to the latest standards.

Security. Specialists in data security as well as physical security for employees and workplaces will be in growing demand

STRESS RELIEF

Employees are likely to get a more sympathetic ear this year from employers if they request more flexibility to balance their work and personal lives, says Greg Durant, Toronto office practice leader for Watson Wyatt Canada.

CareerBuilder's survey confirms it: 66 per cent of employers say they already offer flexible schedules to employees, and 46 per cent will provide more flexibility in arrangements, from telecommuting to compressing work weeks, in 2008.

It's not only about trying to keep prized talent happy, it's also about the bottom line. Forty-eight per cent of 355 employers in the United States and Canada surveyed last month by Watson Wyatt said that stress-related absences and presenteeism – employees who show up for work but are inefficient because they're under too much pressure – hurt their business performance.

The survey also found 92 per cent are planning to increase spending on employee wellness programs and benefit plans in an effort to keep people on the job and healthy.

The top four wellness initiatives most companies are considering are: additional programs to provide employees more options to balance work and personal life; ergonomic workstations; fitness subsidies or an in-house fitness program; and more comprehensive return-to-work plans to help employees get back to work after being on sick leave.

GLOBE TROTTING

As operations expand globally, employees are going to have to expect to face more business travel, says human resources specialist Kerry Gray, a partner with Ernst & Young LLP in Toronto.

"It's economic reality," he says, "We have an increasingly North American economy that is breaking down the border. Companies are increasingly multinational and will find it increasingly less economical to have specialists in each of their locations. So, if they can't find the talent they need where they need it, they will bring people in from another location."

This trend is already a way of life for consulting firms, resource companies and American companies with divisions in Canada. "And those who are just getting into the work force are going to expect that, in their future careers, they are going to have to be doing a lot of business travel."

BE A "CAREER-PRENEUR"

While 2008 is expected to bring career opportunities, many of these opportunities may be in new fields not widely known or requiring technical skills you may not yet possess. That's just one of the factors that makes it important for you to take charge of your career: Don't wait for a recruiter to call but become an independent agent responsible for your career success, Ms. Graham says.

The start of the year is the perfect opportunity to sit down and write a script of your career as you

want it to play out rather than waiting for it to happen, she says.

"Think of yourself as being a business: What is your objective and what do you need to do to meet the target?"

"Write down a description of where you want to be one year, three years and five years down the road and what experiences or skills you need to have to reach your goal," she recommends.

"By knowing where you want to go and taking advantage of opportunities as they come along, you can advance in your career, no matter what comes along in the economy in the next year."

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