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The Waiting Game

Why Employers Are Taking Longer to Make Hiring Decisions

The interview went smoothly, your resume was impeccable and your skills match the job requirements line for line. You sent along clever thank you notes and, with a glimmer in his eye, the hiring manager said you were a top candidate for the job. So what happened? Why haven't you heard from the potential employer for weeks?

Welcome to the newer, slower and more guarded job market. Employers have decelerated recruitment and hiring processes, raising the anxiety of job seekers everywhere. Has hiring become a lower priority for businesses today? Are hiring managers hoping to gain negotiating leverage by keeping candidates in the dark longer? Are job seekers ignoring the signs of gentle rejection?

For candidates, waiting can be excruciating, especially when between jobs or considering multiple opportunities. A look into how market fluctuations and recent talent wars have changed the way businesses approach the hiring process today can help job seekers reduce job-hunt anxieties.

It's the Economy

While it seems like the catch all answer for any business hitch today, the recent recession and slow economic recovery have affected both hiring budgets and schedules. Because hiring budgets are strictly limited, each and every hire means more to the organization and the department seeking a new addition. Rather than speeding up the process, having fewer positions to fill has caused businesses to slow down and evaluate candidates more intently. The pressure to find the right hire and spend limited employment funds wisely has made hiring managers more cautious and the approval process more complex.

It's the Lack of Urgency

Market conditions and the push to streamline business structures and operations did force numerous organizations to put hiring on hold. With fewer staff handling greater portions of the workload, businesses and employees adjusted to a new way of working.

"Organizations have been conditioned to do without," says Brendan Courtney, vice president of Spherion® Professional Services. "The sense of urgency, which once drove managers to push for faster hiring decisions, is gone."

As teams continue to get by with fewer talent resources, managers have little motivation to hurry into hiring, adding more time to an already slowing recruitment process.

It's History

It's also important to remember that the late 1990s talent rush, a mad hiring binge for many organizations, is still fresh in the minds of HR professionals, recruiters and hiring managers. At a time when hiring bonuses looked more like salaries and workplace perks outshone game show grand prizes, managers saw their full-time employees dart for new opportunities in record numbers. Tenure shrank rapidly as job-hopping pervaded all industries and talent levels.

The recruitment and turnover costs to businesses were remarkable, too expensive for the '90s much less today. Organizations cannot afford the expensive uncertainty of those hiring heydays. Determined to keep from falling into frenzied hiring again, businesses are now embracing caution, moving slowly and deliberately even when a good candidate is found.

It's Complicated

Both history and a difficult economy have caused many organizations to not only add more prudence to the hiring process but also to add more process.

"More layers have been added to the entire hiring procedure," says Vice President of Spherion® Professional Services Wayne Voris. "More people have to approve the candidate, the salary and the package. The result is a more complicated, time-consuming process for hiring one great employee."

As more and more resume fraud comes to light, businesses are increasing the intensity of background checks. As more executives pay attention to the significant costs of employment, salary and bonus approvals are reaching higher and higher into the business hierarchy. The result is a more labor-intensive process that can add weeks to any recruitment timeline.

It's Population

Job seekers must also remember that today they are far from alone in the search for the next career opportunity. Layoffs and high unemployment mean there are more candidates in the marketplace competing for open jobs and the attention of hiring managers. Employers are sorting through more resumes, screening more candidates and conducting more interviews. Today's HR professionals and hiring managers are wary of speed and much more willing to scour growing talent pools, leaving no resume unscanned.

It's an Opportunity

So what can anxious job seekers do to quell job-search unease? Look on the bright side. A slower hiring process also offers benefits to employees in search of employment. First, it gives job seekers time to evaluate opportunities and potential employers and allows for more measured decision making. Use the additional time to research the companies further and analyze the jobs from top to bottom. If you didn't have time before the interview, research how the business is ranked as an employer.

If you have questions that weren't answered in the interview process, now is the time to ask using an appropriate, professional approach such as a brief, articulate e-mail. But remember: never harass a potential supervisor with questions and calls. Persistence demonstrates commitment and interest but, if you go overboard, you risk irritating the people you are trying to impress.

This waiting period is also a time for you to look at other hiring options. Take time to continue searching the marketplace and looking at what other employers have to offer. Another great job opportunity could turn up or give you even more negotiating leverage when the sought-after job offer arrives. Consider free-agent opportunities, such as consulting and contract work. Is there a way to put your skills to work as you wait to secure your next full-time job? Many recruitment firms, including Spherion, place skilled,

Technology Hiring

What's the mind frame of hiring managers seeking technology talent today? Operating on leaner hiring budgets and in the wake of the IT bust, hiring managers are looking for:

- Professionals whose technical talents are balanced with a strong set of soft skills, such as communication skills, innovative spirit, self-reliance and assertiveness.*
- A track record of successes that extends beyond the IT boom years and demonstrates the ability to achieve and innovate under pressure.*
- The right combination of technology skills and business acumen, which leads to the best all-around hire for each job.*

experienced professionals in project-based roles, helping professionals keep their skills current while seeking the right career opportunity.

It's Not Going to Last

Frustrated job seekers can take heart. Businesses cannot sustain prolonged hiring processes. Organizations with leisurely hiring procedures miss out on top candidates. By the time an offer is finally made, top-notch employees have been snatched off the market and the employer must select from mediocre matches.

In addition, businesses that take too much time to hire employees risk productivity declines. While workers today have learned to work harder and longer due to reduced resources and smaller teams, endurance for heavy workloads is not sustainable. To keep existing employees from burnout and provide much needed support, businesses need to begin hiring faster and more efficiently.

In the end, job seekers will soon see the hiring pace accelerate. While it may never reach the breakneck speeds of the '90s, hiring will gather momentum, improving the balance between a job seeker's desire to quickly secure worthwhile work and a business' need to make strategic hiring decisions.