

THE STRAITS TIMES: Tuesday, October 15, 2002



Recruitment slows down with threat of war

As talk of war between the United States and Iraq dominates the headlines, bosses are more hesitant to hire, recruitment consultants say.

Hiring, already very cautious, has slowed down perceptibly in the last two months, Ms Emily Foo, managing director of EL Consult, told Recruit. This is especially so for top management jobs with regard to positions for restructuring and change management, and business development. The worst hit, she noticed, are the technology companies and the electronics and semiconductor industries.

According to Ms Doris Cheng, a headhunter with her own firm, Doris Cheng & Associates, technology companies are now “very, very cautious to hire”.

The head of one headhunting firm who declined to be named said that out of 20 recruitment assignments it had collected over the past six months, 15 were suspended just in the past few weeks.

Junior Positions Available

Mr. Dhirendra Shantilal, managing director (Asia) for recruitment firm Business Trends, said that despite the slowdown at the senior management level, it is still “vibrant” at the junior level. This is especially so in clerical, technical, staffing and call centre jobs.

Agreeing, Ms Cynthia Chew, managing director of Adecco Singapore, said that this quarter is traditionally a more difficult time to hire people. “We are seeing more contract-basis jobs being offered at the junior level”.

There is also a possibility that more jobs will be shaved, warned Ms Cheng, as investors are also less keen to pump funds into companies. Ms Foo, on the other hand, felt that companies are already very lean.

“Much of the cost-cutting has already been done,” she said. “Most companies would rather keep costs low than cut any more costs and hang in there”.

Ms Foo, like Mr Shantilal, felt that the horrific bomb attacks in Bali over the weekend were not likely to affect hiring decisions.

The terrorist threat is something companies have had to face up to since 9/11”, said Ms Foo. “It’s not something new they have to factor into their forecasts”.

Should war break out, how long will it be before the job market rebounds?

Ms Foo, while claiming that she was “cautiously bullish”, said that the Gulf War experience suggests that the war in Iraq could be short, and the rebound, hopefully, quick.

She said: “I was in equity sales when the Gulf War broke out. There was a horrendous plunge. People were selling one day and buying the next. So I’m not scared. If you have the guts to hand in there, you’ll reap the rewards.”

On a balance, all four recruitment firms felt that the pick-up would be slow. Ms Cheng said: “It will be a tough 2003 for the most part.”

People, she said, are also hesitant to switch jobs as the economy is still uncertain.

“Many would rather wait to be retrenched with benefits than to start anew with another firm”.

Jobs in expanding sectors

But that doesn’t mean jobseekers should be disheartened. Mr Shantilal said that many sectors continue to do well such as logistics, high-end technology, the life sciences and the chemicals sector.

“There are still many jobs out there,” said Ms Cheng. “You should be proactive, network and be positive when you go for interviews. If you feel pessimistic and defeated, who would hire you?”

As for the fresh graduate looking for a job now, Adecco’s Ms Chew had this advice:

“Keep your options open. Be ready for contract assignments and don’t be afraid to try something different.”

Doris Cheng, Managing Director
391A Orchard Road
#13-08 Ngee Ann City Tower A
Singapore 238873
Email: d.cheng@pacific.net.sg
Direct Line +65 68872232