

Recruiting and Hiring Advice

Seasonal Hiring Trends for Growing Businesses

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For organizations with 50 or a few hundred employees, [seasonal hiring](#) for peak season is a perennial challenge. In 2011 the challenge is only getting steeper, as labor costs come under greater scrutiny in the post-recession retrenchment.

“This economic shift has forced businesses and schools into a new model and made them see the value proposition of seasonal labor,” says Brian Keenan, president of the consulting and staffing division of Core Education and Consulting Solutions of Atlanta.

Seasonal Hiring Is Redefined

Indeed, [temporary staffing](#) is expanding into new sectors like education, as companies look to squeeze every drop out of work schedules. “Our clients are experiencing a confluence of two realities: budgetary constraints and seasonal patterns,” says Keenan.

For example, to live within shrinking budgets, many schools are bringing in non-executive secretaries for the 9-month school year, to serve both parents and faculty, he says.

In the [hospitality industry](#), long accustomed to leveraging seasonal labor, the slack in the US labor market is providing a rare opportunity to upgrade the quality of this specialized workforce.

“When I was working in the hospitality industry, we would just grab seasonal people -- if you had a pulse, you’d be hired,” says Jeff Lolli, an instructor at Widener University’s School of Hospitality Management in Chester, Pa. “Today there’s a much greater pool of people, and employers are being extremely selective.”

Students Are a Better Value than Ever

Students with a healthy work ethic have always been a strategic component of the seasonal workforce, even if they have little or no industry-specific background. But now, with jobs scarce, students in a given industry provide even greater value as seasonal employees -- and more are available for work. “It’s become very difficult for our hospitality students to get seasonal positions,” says Lolli. “Some have even worked for free.”

Students and [college recruits](#) can provide seasonal help while simultaneously bonding with the employer, cultivating a professional relationship that could feed the recruitment pipeline.

“Some of our seasonal workers are accounting students in the junior or senior years,” says Karla Dennis, CEO of Cohesive Tax, an accounting firm in Cypress, Calif. “They have a very good fundamental background, so they’re doing reconciliation, payroll tax returns, W-2s, and so on.”

Seasoned Workers for Seasonal Work

Many employers, finding more of last year’s seasonal workers still available, are bolstering their contingent workforces with returnees who provide year-over-year continuity and season-specific experience.

“Some of our seasonal people have been with us for a number of years,” says **Alan Fiske, managing director of Fiske & Co., a Plantation, Fla.**, consulting and accounting firm. These professionals are accustomed to the part-time income that comes with the job, according to Fiske.

While many seasonal workers would jump at any offer of permanent employment, others are content with a job that comes with a periodic schedule.

“For some of our seasonal staff, this is their second job, or they’re taking classes,” says Jessica Barrera, human resources manager for Blue Plate Catering in Chicago. Blue Plate’s seasonal workers appreciate [workplace flexibility](#); “our staff books their own schedules,” Barrera says.

Signs Point to Slight Tightening in Labor

Although the [US unemployment rate](#) is still very high, the seasonal employment market may be starting to shift some power back to workers.

“Our fill times for school districts are getting a little longer now,” says Keenan. In the hospitality industry, hotels and resorts are reinvesting in recruitment, anticipating an accelerating recovery. “We’ll have 50 recruiters at our career fair in 2011, up from 32 last year and 25 the year before,” says Lolli.

Unemployment Taxes Are a Rising Issue

Multiple extensions to unemployment benefits have distorted the labor market for many business owners. “Some of our clients have had challenges recruiting because their jobs are relatively low paid and workers can collect unemployment for up to 2 years,” says Rob Wilson, president of human resources outsourcing firm Employco in Westmont, Ill.

The current state of unemployment compensation has also motivated many companies to think twice before hiring substantial numbers of seasonal workers, only to have them collect unemployment benefits through the entire off season, often at additional expense to the employer.

“If you lay off workers, depending on the state, it can cause your unemployment tax rate to rise,” says William Even, a labor economist and professor at the Farmer School of Business at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. In some situations it’s better to keep those employees on and increase and decrease hours with the season, Even advises.