

How to sell yourself in an adverse job market

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The recent economic downturn has changed priorities for business leaders, at least for now. Suddenly, boards of directors need to take drastic action as they fight for the survival of their businesses.

The first and most obvious target is the employee cost base. In this environment, 'old fashioned' HR skills come to the fore in the guise of the

employee relations specialist. Nevermind talent management for now, they might say, how can we reduce our employee costs while maintaining productivity and competitiveness?

Contrast

This new picture is in contrast to the recent trend towards business partnership in the HR function. The development of the concept of talent management has helped HR directors to secure a voice in strategic conversations in organisations. Boards and chief executives no longer pay lip service to the development and deployment of their people but rather they are prepared to back the HR function with investment and resources as they seek to win the 'war for talent'.

All of which might confuse HR professionals who are looking to make a career move. Should they continue to emphasise their grasp of the talent management agenda or return to their 'roots' by brushing up on employment legislation and practice? Well, that depends on how long you think the downturn is going to last.

Temporary

If you take the majority view that we will be back to growth next year, then it follows that the return to basics outlined above is a temporary phenomenon and the long-term trend is still towards a strategic approach to the management of talent. This is not to suggest that the basics of employee relations are unimportant – they

are not. In fact, as we re-enter a growth phase and the employment market becomes competitive, organisations that have continued to treat their employees with respect and have managed change sensitively and competently will be well placed to take advantage. Those who have allowed their standards to slip will pay a heavy price in terms of employee turnover and their reputation as an employer.

The inescapable conclusion is that flexibility is the key to continued career success in the short term. HR professionals must be prepared to use all the tools they have acquired over the years and not be precious about staying at the leading edge. And they must be able to show their relevance to the role they're chasing.

Relevant

As Grant Weinberg, associate director, international talent acquisition, at Gilead Sciences, points out: "Selling yourself in today's market is about ensuring the hiring manager reviewing your CV can identify relevant experience to the role straight away. Too often, hiring managers have to review the CV to work out what skills the applicant can bring to the role".

He also points out the importance of return on investment, and says: "If the applicant can demonstrate their experience and the potential return on investment their appointment would make, they are much more likely to be asked to interview".

But the long-term trend is still towards true business partnership and the strategic management of talent. The most successful HR leaders over the next year will be those who can show they can help companies through these difficult times with practical programmes and still keep talent management on the board's agenda.

If you only do 5 things:

1. Be open to change
2. Understand the market
3. Network
4. Update your skills
5. Keep an eye on the economy