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An Environmental Career Perspective in these Economic Times

AIPG Newsletter - Winter 2008/2009

With the current market conditions, we routinely hear the same questions. What is it like out there? What is going on? Who is making moves? We have found the answer to these questions to be relatively simple. The firms with the solid business models will continue to position themselves, regardless of current market conditions. It takes a firm with capital to deploy and the courage to deploy it.

When looking at unemployment numbers rising, one must realize that numbers are not indicative of professional and managerial employment numbers. The rise in this sector, which is where Environmental Professionals reside, is usually significantly less. Not surprisingly, many industries are seeing declines in employment, but there are still areas that haven't been hit, some surprising, others not. Natural resources and mining are up nearly 8 percent from last August, driven by both mineral and petroleum extraction. Insurance carriers and related activities, though not up, haven't seen the declines that other financial services have. Professional and technical services, which includes accountants, scientists, architects, engineers and computer systems designers is up a little more than 2 percent since last year. Health and education, which have remained solid throughout the downturn, are now up more than 3 percent over the same period.

Do's and Don'ts of hiring from a Company and Candidate Perspective

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From a company standpoint, there is nothing wrong with allowing the fat to be trimmed as that is healthy for any firm and the economy in general. That is a business model that many firms employ in these times. For those firms looking to gain an advantage for when this market cycles through, (and it always does) the ability to continue to hire quality Environmental Professionals remains foremost in their thoughts. Economic reasons are one of many. Baby boomers are retiring at the rate of almost 9,000 a day. Some firms have become stagnant with seeing this. Other firms refuse to accept the pay scale of the market. If a candidate is qualified and has the cultural fit, but seems to upset the internal "applecart" of structure, many firms will shy away. This is the state of all industries and true talent will continue to be in stronger and stronger demand. Short sighted firms continue to struggle. This is an area where we can strongly advise our clients, but only they can truly determine the "pain" of not making this hire. Many clients need the reality that if you are a B firm and want an A player, you cannot get them for a B compensation package.

On the candidate side, some are looking for the "homerun" move that involves little or no perceived risk. The candidates who cannot see the forest for the trees has become a predominant style. Rarely is an opportunity able to mitigate most of the risk. A good written offer might address 80% of concerns on paper. The other 20% will always be that leap of faith. Often candidates have what they are looking for in a new opportunity and find something to continually move the goal post further back. Candidates need to focus on where there will be in their current situation and compare to their new opportunity at the 12, 24 and 60 month time frames. Principal level folks concerned about sick time, junior level folks concerned about \$500 in salary, mid-level folks who want to jump to the next level without bringing anything to the table except an admirable career track. These are the types of career killers that are examples of being short-sighted, mis-focused and will continue to hold people back. Candidates, who have been with one firm for a long tenure, must make sure of their resume advancing as well. To be successful in your current firm does not guarantee that those projects and qualities will transfer into the marketplace. Did you advance up the value ladder as well as the salary ladder? This type of candidate often will be

surprised to find that making a move is not so easy. They were actually overpaid in their current firm and hence do not want to take any type of lateral move or pay cut in order to get on a better career track.

The higher you go in the salary ladder the more you need to define yourself compared to the market, not your firm. For the managerial folks, this means adding true business development to your resume. For the technical folks, it means more complex, cutting edge projects. Accepting counter-offers from current firms are also career killers. 90% of people who accept counter offers are no longer employed by that firm 12 months later. 80% of the time they have restarted their job search in 3 months. Culture, career track and quality of life issues will always make for the best hire. The "eat what you kill" mentality can work but for very few and usually not for the long term. These are the folks that come to us and say "I'm looking to get out of consulting and into the private sector".

On a final note, companies and candidates need to look at their situations objectively. Companies need to ask, "What am I doing to attract and sell this candidate". All members involved in the interview process need to sell the firm and the opportunity. The days of sitting back with your feet up and asking the candidate "so tell me why you want to work here", are gone. Candidates need to show what they can bring to the table and that they are ready to work quickly to become a productive member of the team. When the offer stage does come, firms need to remember the way you extend an offer is the way you start the on boarding process. On the candidate side, the way you accept an offer is the way you begin your employment.