

Analysis

Spring the employment trap

● Find the right staff while addressing skills shortages

BY LIZA VAN WYK

Last year, the Institute for Chartered Accountants complained that they spent 18 months interviewing thousands of young people vying for 50 bursaries, and still could not fill the complement.

Their challenge is not isolated. Sasol imported 1 000 Taiwanese welders last year for three months to help with an urgent project. Meanwhile Stats SA shows that official unemployment is between 27% and 40%, of which 60 000 (in 2004) are graduates.

Despite this challenge, every business struggles to find suitable staff. Employers spend too much time scouting for talent, and if they make a recruitment mistake, it eats into your time. Now you have to manage the person, creating stress for you and the employee.

There are tax benefits for training staff, however, and people are more likely to stay with a company that is interested in their development.

SA companies underestimate the enormous benefits of the global service industry, which is now a significant foreign exchange earner to nations like India and Ireland. The service industry outperforms manufacturing and resource beneficiation as a major foreign exchange earner.

Take Ireland, which was heavily in debt two decades ago and which today, is the second richest country in the world. In 1990, Ireland had 11 000 people in the internationally traded services sector – by 1992, that figure had leapt to 71 000.

A 2004 report from the Irish government notes that, "Irish service exports such as financial, software, contact centres and shared services grew faster than any of the top 30 exporters in the world in 2002. This propelled Ireland to the top of the global league table of service exporters, a global ranking that is now higher than its ranking at 19th for merchandise goods."

How did they do it? "Lifelong skills development will become progressively more important in the decade ahead, as the fast-changing nature of the workplace requires people to be more flexible and adaptable."

In the first week of March, this country of 4.5 million people declared that a million Irish workers had to double their skills in the next decade for Ireland to retain its high achievement levels.

For SA to have similar ambitions, it should target 10 million of its people to double their skills, yet it barely has that many employed.

As a service provider, SA has over the years doubled its growth every year, and should treble its annual growth if the right staff can be found. For small to medium enterprises (SMEs) to meet those ambitions for growth, they need to hire people whose core values match theirs, and train them.

When BizTech started out as a small company, it was a hit and miss affair concerning recruitment. When someone phoned about buying their house, they were asked to employ her daughter instead.

Another time it took ages for the company to recover from the ineptness of a bookkeeper who wasn't efficient.

BizTech started to research the market and realised that mid-level employees are the heart of an organisation. They found that if you send an executive for training and who did not have the backing from highly skilled staff, then their best efforts were reduced.

Similarly, many graduates walk into their first job and battle to apply the theory they learnt in college or university. The failure to train staff and boost their efficiency affects overall resource costing – if staff are not efficient, then you need more staff to do the job.

Bosses often do not fully appreciate the high level of skills needed for tasks they give to people, and that impacts on the company's image. Staff with little or no training battle to make the grade, or money which is wasted through involving high-priced consultants, events planning, designing invitations and adverts. These are

some of the skills that executives do not appreciate, but which impact the company's image. When recruiting, there is a written checklist to follow which is planned around core values of attitude, accountability, self-motivation and good organisational skills, and competencies. The bottom line is that without ongoing learning, neither you as an individual or company will achieve real potential.

RECRUITMENT CHECK LIST

Essential advice to remember:

● Don't rely on recruitment agencies' claims of an applicant's competency, test them yourself;

- Advertise, but be specific about job requirements;
- Don't conduct quick interviews, rather give each candidate an hour; and
- Ensure that you assess prospective new employees under the following categories:
 - Planning, organising and results orientation;
 - Quality orientation;
 - Self-motivation, problem solving and decision making;
 - Client orientation;
 - Interpersonal sensitivity; and
 - Personal integrity and confidentiality.
- *Van Wyk is the chief executive officer of BizTech, an SME that offers various courses for employees. Contact her at ☎ 011 45 35291 or info@biztech.co.za.*



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