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Staff retention top priority in 2010

Hiring will be cautious amid slow recovery

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FOR THE CALGARY HERALD

Both employers and employees are looking ahead more optimistically to a fresh slate in 2010, but there is no shortage of challenges facing corporations and job hunters in the year ahead.

An informal survey of recruiters and human resource consultants shows that while the economy appears to be slowly recovering from the deep recession felt last year, business leaders will struggle to address ongoing concerns even as the hiring outlook improves as the year unfolds.

The top five workplace issues in 2010, as predicted by those surveyed, reveal some ongoing challenges and some new concerns. Talk of a so-called jobless recovery doesn't mean employees won't be looking for better opportunities if the economy picks up steam. After a year of mounting workloads, longer hours, pay freezes or cuts, and layoffs, staff morale is low and retaining top employees will be a top priority for 62 per cent of employers, according to a survey by Right Management.

"The challenge, then, for 2010 for companies will be how to re-

engage, re-energize and refresh a tired workforce," says DiAnne Bond, market vice-president of Western Canada for Right Management. "A tired workforce does not breed creativity, innovation or loyalty."

During a recession, employees tend to stay with their employers. As the market starts to turn, workers will be seizing the chance for change and advancement.

"If employers fail to keep their existing workers satisfied now, they risk losing them when the job market picks up," says Koula Vasilopoulos, Calgary branch manager with Robert Half International.

Most economists agree hiring plans tend to lag in a recovery following a recession, as companies are cautious about investing in new employees until they see some level of certainty. Recruiters say hiring will likely increase in the last half of 2010, but don't expect to see large-scale hiring after all of the layoffs in 2009.

"Expect to see employers ease back into adding to their workforce by starting with contract and temporary jobs until the economy stabilizes further," says Shannon Bowen-Smeed.

It's a guessing game for employers trying to determine staffing levels in a volatile and uncertain economy, but the fact that Statistics Canada's Labour Force survey found three out of the last four months experienced job gains across the country is a positive initial indicator of further job creation in 2010.



Koula Vasilopoulos, branch manager of Robert Half International, says employers who fail to keep their workers satisfied during recessionary times risk losing them when the market picks up.

by finding and accentuating the positives, and managing and overcoming the negatives," says Gupta-Sunderji.

The pace of technological innovation continues to move at lightning speed and companies will have to figure out how to effectively adopt it into their business strategy. At the same time, the proliferation of mobile devices means employees now have online access at all times.

Restricting a user's access on work computers does nothing to address workers' access to social media such as Twitter and Facebook.

"This is an emerging and awkward issue and leaders are already struggling with what, if any, policies and safeguards they should put in place to manage this," says Gupta-Sunderji.

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they need to make virtual leadership work," says Merge Gupta-Sunderji, a leadership and workplace communication expert.

A continued focus on succession planning will also have to include more emphasis on managing multiple generations in the workplace. As people live longer, many are choosing to work longer or in part-time or consultative roles.

From the traditionalists to the baby boomers to gen X and gen Y, each generation brings its own style of working and sometimes competing values or ideologies into the workplace.

The goal must be to tap into and to develop the unique talents of each demographic and get all the generations working in harmony.

"The challenge for HR professionals and leaders is to get all the generations working together

Forty-five per cent of companies surveyed by Right Management found developing leaders and high-potential talent was a priority in 2010 as part of a greater need to develop clearly identifiable accountabilities at the individual level and within senior leadership teams.

"Given the past year, all levels of employees are acutely aware of the lack of accountability and transparency at the highest levels of many businesses and industries," says Bond.

Long-distance leadership skills will also become more highly valued in an increasingly mobile, global workforce.

"Managers and supervisors... are still struggling with the challenges of virtual leadership, so it's up to the HR professionals and leaders in organizations to make sure that they give their people the training and support