

Responding to a Worldwide Talent Shortage (10.08.2008)

Online Networking Communities Offer Strategic Recruiting Tool

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Five years ago, when BP Commercial Manager Mike Lutz was offered the opportunity to work in Baku, Azerbaijan, he jumped at the chance. "We were working in an offshore basin that was opening up from 150,000 barrels per day (bpd) to 1,500,000 bpd. It was a once-in-a-career opportunity."

Professionals like Lutz, who is now based in Houston, Texas, have discovered that Eurasia's burgeoning oil and gas market offers technical challenges and opportunities not often available with established projects in the United States. And although companies are focused on hiring local talent, expatriates are still in demand to help ramp up national employees and add valued expertise and technical knowledge to projects.

Competing for Hires

Attracting experienced talent to Eurasia has not always been easy. Ten years ago, oil and gas companies struggled to entice professionals to work in many Eurasian locations. Improved standards of living and attractive incentive packages made opportunities more attractive, but a worldwide talent shortage is once again making hiring more difficult.

Experienced geologists, engineers and other professionals within the oil and gas industry are facing retirement, and companies are struggling to fast-track younger professionals. Less than 10 percent of students in the U.S. are pursuing engineering degrees, and according to Manpower, a world leader in the employment services industry, engineering positions have become among the 10 hardest jobs to fill. In addition the demands of an industry operating at full capacity leaves little room for the training and mentoring needed to ramp up younger hires.

In response, companies are heavily recruiting experienced professionals, creating a competitive recruiting environment where companies vie for each experienced hire. In this environment companies seeking experienced professionals for Eurasian-based opportunities must compete with other countries and industries outside the oil and gas industry.

The Value of Online Networking

Many major oil and gas companies have discovered the value of online networking communities as a strategic recruiting tool for attracting former employees and retirees for training, mentoring and long- and short-term assignments around the globe.

CRJC International is an online networking and recruiting organization, which serves the recruiting needs of a number of Fortune 100 companies. The site hosts a number of employee networking communities for oil and gas companies. Individuals can join the online community hosted by their former employer or join the industrywide network at <http://www.Connexpro.org>. These communities enable professionals around the globe to network with other oil and gas professionals and indicate their interest in full- and part-time job opportunities.

"Employees leave a company for a variety of reasons—new projects, an interest in consulting, early retirement, family reasons or as part of an acquisition or industry downturn. Online professional networking communities ensure that talent isn't forgotten once it walks out the door. These communities help to keep the door open for future job opportunities," explains Cathy Clonts, president of CRJC International. In addition to keeping employees connected, online communities feature opportunities for former employees to keep their resumes online and indicate availability for short- and long-term consulting, project work, training, mentoring and interim management, as well as a willingness to travel.

"Companies can specifically target professionals who are open to working in other countries—those up for adventure and opportunity," Clonts says.

Challenging Opportunities

Jeff Arnoldi, a ConocoPhillips engineer, took an assignment in Russia three years ago. "I was placed directly in a Russian company and asked to share knowledge and advise the company on energy issues. The work was challenging and it was an exciting assignment. Moscow is an exciting city, and Russia's energy industry has tremendous opportunities," Arnoldi says. "We were totally immersed in a Russian company, so we needed language skills and we needed to quickly learn the Russian business culture. The Russian business culture is strongly based on personal relationships, so we worked very hard to develop these relationships. This also made learning about Russian culture that much easier."

When faced with the decision to work on an established project in the U.S. or travel to Jakarta, Indonesia, to work side by side with national employees, consultant Shaun Hoolahan chose Eurasia. "Indonesia represented the opportunity to experience a completely different culture from what I was accustomed to," he relates.

During his two-year stay, Hoolahan did everything from fostering the transfer of technologies for reservoir simulation and recovery techniques, to guiding field development leading environmental engineering efforts, to serving as acting manager over eight expatriates and 23 national employees and contractors.

He explains that his work with the national staff had the most profound impact on him. "There is always risk associated with

working in foreign locations, but there are also life-changing rewards. Working with the local employees was by far the most enriching part of my experience. The national staff showed a deep appreciation for the work entrusted to them and exhibited high levels of dedication and professionalism. They were not only working the assigned projects with their minds, but with their hearts.”

“With the number of opportunities growing, and individuals having the chance to pick and choose, online networks give professionals a vehicle for communicating with former associates about opportunities spanning the globe. In addition to learning about job opportunities, they can discuss lifestyle issues, company culture and other specifics which help them determine which opportunity will suit them best. Online networking communities give professionals and companies a way to connect and take advantage of that once-in-a-career opportunity,” Clonts concludes.

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