



FIRMS ARE COMPETING FOR TALENT IN A TIGHT LABOR MARKET, BUT SOME JOB SEEKERS FEEL LEFT BEHIND

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The hiring landscape has changed in favor of job seekers amid record low unemployment on Long Island, local executives say. Even as many industries struggle to find workers, some applicants say landing good-paying posi-

tions remains a challenge.

Long Island's annual unemployment rate hit 3.7 percent in 2018, the lowest it's been since 2000, according to state Labor Department data. Nationwide, unemployment is at a 50-year low, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

There are now 1.2 million more job openings than there

are unemployed Americans, Labor Department data show.

"There is a war for talent," said Jennifer Carey, president of the Long Island chapter of the Society for Human Resource Management.

Increasingly, that's giving job applicants the upper hand.

"In the past, employers asked all the questions," Carey said.

Now, "I find that candidates are interviewing us."

The shifting dynamic has led companies to change their recruiting and hiring methods and put increased focus on crafting a culture that attracts and retains employees. In some cases they are boosting pay, experts said.

Jorie Mack, lead recruiter for Purolator International in Jeri-

cho, said one of the biggest changes in hiring has been giving job seekers as much information as possible up front.

"I need to provide them with as much information about the company as possible," said Mack, who oversees hiring for the logistics company's 30 U.S. lo-

See HIRE on A34

HIRE from A33

cations. "Candidates tend to have more opportunities or more offers on the table. I could be speaking to a candidate who has two to three potential offers from different organizations in front of them," she said.

Recruiting challenges vary by location and position type, forcing the company to adopt a mix of tools, including social media sites Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, and online job boards such as Indeed.com, to reach as many job seekers as it can, Mack said.

Indeed and other job sites bring in nearly 50 percent of new hires, she said. But some positions, such as sales, require more effort to fill. Puro-lator finds 80 percent of its sales hires by going after people at other companies who are not job hunting, Mack said. "They are not necessarily actively applying. My job is to grab their attention."

Michele Azzara, labor specialist with the Suffolk County Department of Labor, said the changing hiring market is having an impact on many of the companies that work with the county's One-Stop Employment Center in Hauppauge.

"They are struggling to find qualified candidates for their positions," she said. "Some have increased their pay rate. Others are seeking different avenues."

Company participation in the county's regular job fairs has increased, she said.

Traffic from job seekers coming into the employment center "has gotten to an all-time low," Azzara said, adding that many who visit the center are employed but seeking outside training to enhance their skills and grow their opportunities.

Rob Basso, chief executive of Associated Human Capital Management in Plainville, which handles payroll and HR functions for about 1,000 small and midsize firms, said many job seekers can be choosier. "The leverage [candidates have] is across the board but more significant when the position becomes more important and integral to the company that is doing the hiring," he said, adding that his sales of applicant tracking and recruitment software are up.

'Ghosting' increasing

Incidents of applicants "ghosting," a term borrowed from the dating world describing the practice of ending a relationship suddenly and with-



New employees Tiara Mitchell of Westbury, left, and Mayerlin Arias of Lindenhurst chat at orientation at Adjuvant.Health in Melville.

RECRUITING from thin ranks

Businesses are competing to hire scarce talent in a tight labor market

out communication, have become more frequent, he said.

"They never call you back saying they took another job," said Basso. "It happens in my organization at least six or seven times a year."

Employers are having to do more to grab the attention of potential hires, Basso said.

One key area they're concentrating on is corporate culture. Increasingly, hiring managers said, candidates are looking for business environments that are more egalitarian in nature and less hierarchical in their approach, a trend most evident among millennial job seekers.

"With the newer generation, they want that cultural fit," said

Megan Millevoy, chief people officer of Melville-based Adjuvant.Health and HR vice president of its affiliate, Allied Physicians Group, a local pediatrics health care provider. "They're looking for a place to fit in to have career growth."

Setting the right tone for a workplace, through company-organized community outreach events or relaxed dress codes, can be important in cultivating a competitive edge in a tight labor market.

"We utilize culture as a way to remain competitive," said Millevoy. Adjuvant/Allied employs 800 across the system's headquarters and physician offices. "Our competitors tend to

be large organizations . . . who have a different way of interacting with their employees."

Cultural fit has become such a large part of what the company looks for in new hires that Millevoy said she conducts an "interview solely for culture" with each job candidate.

Danielle Dollinger, 21, a customer service representative at SupplyHouse.com in Melville, said she searched online for months to find a full-time position that would allow her to leave her part-time gig as a bridal consultant.

"I looked a ton," said Dollinger, who finished her degree in photography at LIU Post in December and walked

in her graduation ceremony Friday. She said she was "selective" during her job hunt and turned to review sites like Glassdoor.com for guidance on potential employers. The website allows current and former employees to anonymously rate companies and their management.

Reviews help job seekers

"Reviews were really helpful," said Dollinger, who applied to far fewer companies than she researched. Pay rates were "obviously a factor," but a positive environment played a large part in her decision to apply at SupplyHouse, an online plumbing supply company.

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— Megan Millevoy, chief people officer of Melville-based Adjuvant.Health

“I did research on people who have worked at these companies, because you know some companies aren’t great to work for and people will say that,” she said.

For some Long Island companies staying aware of the role social media can play in recruitment has been a major factor in attracting new hires.

“Reputation is more important than ever before,” said Lisa Milano, senior HR recruiter for Bethpage Federal Credit Union. Milano said that “in an age of information,” candidates want to see candid feedback from others before they pursue an opening.

“Almost every single person we interview mentions reviewing our Glassdoor page,” she said. “It’s across the board.”

To capitalize on the free advertising that positive reviews provide, the company displays its Glassdoor reviews on the career section of its website.

Companies evolving

Linda Army, senior vice president of corporate affairs for Bethpage, said the company’s priorities have evolved over the last five or six years.

“While we have always been member-centered, we now recognize that the best way to serve our members is to provide the best possible work experience for the people on our team who serve our members,” she said.

In the tight labor market, retaining good employees becomes key, experts said.

SterlingRisk Insurance, a broker in Woodbury, fine-tuned its hiring practices as part of a larger effort to develop and nurture a work culture that keeps good employees in its ranks.

“In the past four or five years we’ve definitely become more creative,” said Donna Raab, chief talent officer for SterlingRisk.



Customer rep Danielle Dollinger, left, and HR associate Tara Denning flank Shreyans Shah of India, who feels “lucky” Supplyhouse.com hired him. Under his visa he had to get a job soon after graduation.

NEWSDAY / STEVE PROST



Ronald Crummell of Mastic talks with business developer Dawnette Darden at a job fair in Wyandanch earlier this month.

JOHNNY MILANO

In years past, job interviews often consisted of hypothetical questions geared to finding out how a candidate would act in a given work situation, she said. Now questions focus more on interviewees’ thought processes, since their experience may not be directly applicable to the position.

That’s because the company is more open to hiring candidates who don’t have experience in the insurance industry, Raab said. In many cases the firm would prefer to hire a less experienced applicant who is a good fit for the company culture over an experienced candidate who wouldn’t be a team player.

SterlingRisk uses personality surveys to better understand candidates and has moved to-

ward panel-style interviews in which applicants not only speak to an HR representative, but department managers and rank and file employees as well.

“It’s more of a dialog that we have together,” Raab said, adding that the collaborative approach leads to greater “buy-in” from peers who will be working closely with a prospective hire.

Hurdles for some

While hiring executives say low unemployment has given job seekers a leg up, many on Long Island still face hurdles to landing the right job.

Shreyans Shah, 24, hired recently as a programmer at SupplyHouse, worried about his job prospects despite working in a tech field increasingly des-

where else until I find that job.”

After getting her license she felt that “jobs were going to be open to me,” she said. “But the jobs that are open require experience. It’s hard for me to get experience if the jobs that are open require experience.”

For the time being, Jean said, she’ll be looking for something else suited to her skills as she prepares to start at Suffolk Community College in the fall.

“I’m still hoping and wishing that I can find a job in this field,” she said.

For job seeker Darryl Mitchell, 41, of Amityville, a different set of circumstances makes the job hunt harder.

“There’s only certain things that I can do because I have felonies,” Mitchell said. “Not too many people want you.”

Mitchell said he uses Indeed to apply to as many positions as possible. Sometimes he gets offers, but his criminal record prevents much progress.

“Nobody wants to give you a shot,” he said. And often the employers willing to hire him offer wages so low it’s difficult to make ends meet. “In New York you need to have some decent type of work in order to live.”

Pay vs. high LI costs

While job seekers do have some leverage today, it’s still difficult for many to land jobs that pay enough to cover the Island’s high cost of living, said Gregory DeFreitas, an economics professor at Hofstra University in Hempstead.

For years following the Great Recession, employers had the advantage in a slack job market, and that had a negative impact on wage growth, he said.

DeFreitas said there is more slack in the current market than some might think, because people who have given up looking for a job are not counted as unemployed.

“One can’t just look at the unemployment rate in isolation,” DeFreitas said. Factors including stagnant wage growth and the growing ubiquity of the gig economy, which leaves many workers cobbling together a living from multiple part-time jobs, are making it difficult for many workers to bring home a livable wage.

In many cases the fact that they’re shopping around for jobs selectively may say more about local affordability than job seekers’ confidence, he said. “The people I teach, especially the seniors, they’re nervous. They’re not acting cocky from what I can see.”



BARRY SLOAN

Donna Raab, chief talent officer at SterlingRisk Insurance

perate for talent. A student from India who graduated from George Mason University with his master’s in computer science last spring, he is working under the federal immigration services’ Optional Practical Training program.

Being an international student “makes it even more difficult to find a job because of all the visa constraints. Many companies are not willing to sponsor H1 visas,” he said. Immigration laws require grads to find work within three months of graduation.

“I was worried that I wouldn’t find anything at all,” Shah said. “I feel lucky. There are thousands of cases where it doesn’t work out.”

Starr Jean, 19, of Wyandanch said she’s had no luck landing a job in her field after obtaining her license in phlebotomy several months ago.

“I was looking for a job in that field, but it seems impossible,” said Jean, as she filled out paperwork at a job fair that the Wyandanch Community Resource Center held this month. “So I guess I’m open to any-