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HUMAN RESOURCES

Outlook 2013: Canadian talent wars set to get bloody in 2013

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A skills shortage has taken hold in B.C. and elsewhere in Canada, and research shows that one in every four CEOs is holding back on business initiatives because he or she can't find the right person for the job – or enough people period.

That's just one aspect of the top five human resources challenges for 2013, which include:

1. There's a global war for talent, and Canada needs to step up its game.

Despite the month-to-month variations we see in the overall unemployment rate, there's one disturbing trend that's been getting steadily worse since 2009.

The number of "skilled job" vacancies continues to rise across Canada, because we simply don't have enough skilled people to fill them.

McKinsey and Company's The State of Human Capital study describes it best as a "geographic and skills mismatch that finds many talented workers far from the job openings they are best suited to fill."

This will get only worse in Canada as large natural resource focused projects come on stream, each one looking for thousands of workers. Your HR people are the front line in working to ensure your organization doesn't fall victim to this crisis.

Now is the time to create the skilled leaders of tomorrow and keep them working here – and not in another country.

2. Suddenly, everyone wants numbers.

Most people don't think of HR as a "data heavy" discipline. That's changing heading into 2013. Business leaders demand more evidence and detailed analytics behind every spend and strategy within the business.

There is now an opportunity for social analytics on human resource issues to blend with an organization's financial data.

HR professionals should get on this train now and learn how to master this analytical opportunity that's about to lead the profession, and create competitive advantages for organizations that recognize the importance of this trend.

3. Say goodbye to the desk and 9-to-5 hours – if your skills are in demand.

The skills shortage described earlier means today's in-demand employees have more choice, and employers are more willing to make choices when it comes to employing them. The move to more flexible work arrangements, whether that be home-based or flexible hours, will accelerate further.

Your HR personnel should take the lead in successfully driving through this change.

4. People cost money, and profits aren't rebounding just yet.

Salary and benefits account for more than \$0.50 of every dollar an organization spends. With continuing pressure on profits going into 2013, your HR people will need to control people costs.

Restructuring benefit plans, managing absences and investing wisely in health initiatives that prevent both absences and benefit costs are the kinds of items that shouldn't be seen as separate initiatives but deployed as a unified strategic program aimed at reining in costs.

5. Make the best use of the talent you have, and be a productivity star.

The pressures of the economy are making productivity a priority, and HR people are no longer just the ones who "hire and fire" and ensure everyone follows the rules. HR people have to know "who" can do "what" in an organization and maximize that.

Those who do develop effective talent management systems – and show how they have increased productivity – will gain the credibility and resources to keep on this "strategic" side of HR. •

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