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# Employers need new methods

With more than 13,000 job vacancies in the province, many employers are scratching their heads, trying to figure out how best to attract and retain staff.

Sherry Knight, president of the human resources firm Dimension 11, hosted a forum in Regina on Thursday and offered some pointers on finding the right employee to a gathering of business leaders.

"The old way of just going to the newspaper isn't working anymore, so we have to go beyond that," she said.

Knight said employers have to find new ways of finding staff in an era where there is a surplus of jobs and a shortage of workers. For example, the labour shortage has elevated the importance of holding effective job interviews.

The purpose of job interviews is to find candidates who'll be productive and who'll fit in with a business' culture. But many employers run into trouble by asking prospective employees prohibited questions, such as questions about a candidate's marital status. Employers must learn to "read between the lines" in order to gauge how well prospective employees would fit in, Knight said.

Knight also recommends that employers thoroughly check out the references provided by job applicants.

"Many employers in the past tended to go on their guts," she said.

But gut instinct isn't as helpful as taking the time to speak to people who know those applicants.

"If you don't check references, you're not going to know whether that individual fits your culture as readily and those are the kinds of questions that you want to ask," Knight said.

Knight also said employers should sometimes look beyond the list of references provided by the prospective worker to get a better sense of that individual. She said there are cases where people are able to cherry pick favourable references, but there is an aspect of their work history which might be cause for concern.

Understanding demographics is also a key to solving labour woes, Knight said. She said many employers are able to lure retired people back into the workforce.

"A lot of them aren't earning the kind of pension money that they felt they were going to have," she said.

The key, Knight said, is being able to provide a suitable work-life balance.

"They might look for nine-to-five, two days a week instead of five days a week," she said.

As a result, many employers are now finding that they might need to hire two or three people on a parttime basis to do the work that would previously have been done by one full-time employee.

Employers also need to do a better job of understanding young workers, who are less prone to stick with one career than their parents or grandparents were. Knight said young people are being choosier than their predecessors partly because they know the job market favours employees, but there is a cultural aspect as well.

"Generation Y: We raised those people as decision-makers," she said.

Unfortunately, adopting more effective hiring practices can be time-consuming and robs business managers of valuable time that could be put to more productive use. That's why more and more employers are turning to recruitment firms, Knight said.

"It takes a lot of time ... and that causes an employer to take the focus off of what's important, which is: 'How do we make money?' " she said.

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