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One on One with Sandra Miles

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When you want to get an insider's look at The War For Talent, executive recruiters tend to be the best sources. They are on the front lines of who's hiring, who's not, and what firms and top talent are looking for from each other. To get that insight, Consulting's One-on-One sat down with Sandra Miles, a veteran recruiter and President/CEO of Miles Employment Group.

Consulting: As a veteran recruiter, how does the current employment market compare to prior economic cycles?

Miles: I've been in staffing industry for 25 years and I've never seen things as bad as they are now. The massive layoffs began just after Christmas of 2008 and it has been a slow and painful ride back up.

Consulting: Why has hiring been so slow to recover?

Miles: What we're seeing today is a readjustment that's been at least five years in the making. What we saw, starting in 2005, was a massive appetite for talent. People were getting into management roles, making incredibly high salaries, extraordinarily fast. And in many cases, they didn't have the background or capacity to handle their new roles. Companies were grabbing talent, without training and mentoring them. And they moved them up too quickly. They'd give them new titles because they were afraid that a competitor would lure them away with a higher title and \$10,000 higher salary. It was a period of incredible staff growth and many companies couldn't handle it.

Consulting: And then came the most recent downturn...

Miles: Not a good combination. When the economy hit, the first people to go were all of these people in management roles that probably shouldn't have been there in the first place. Being able to execute a company's growth plan requires a very different skill set from those needed to help stabilize a very challenged company and get it to go forward again.

Consulting: Is the lack of hiring reflective of the economy or a more careful, deliberate approach following the lessons learned from the over hiring?

Miles: While of course the economy plays a part, I think many companies are being cautious—as I suspect they will be for the next couple of years—to implement hiring and promotion systems and procedures to ease people up the ladder. Moving people up too quickly hurt a lot of businesses.

Consulting: What kinds of systems are you finding to be most successful?

Miles: I think the smarter companies are those that are investing in training and intentionally slowing the pace of growth. They aren't hiring too much, too quickly, until they have mentors and a real career path in place. A lot of companies are putting the breaks on hiring until they are really ready.

Consulting: We hear a lot of interest in staff moving from their firm into industry. What can you tell us from your experience moving employees from a professional service environment to an industry environment?

Miles: People I've moved from an accounting firm or a consulting firm into industry tell me that the transition is harder than they thought. Few have a full and complete picture of life inside a company when they're on the outside. Day-to-day management is very different. When you're on the inside, there are so many factors that they didn't have to think about as an outside advisor. The company becomes very human; there are new colleagues, office politics, etc. And there's now even more direct accountability to see through the outcome of your decisions.



Sandra Miles,
President/CEO,
Miles Employment
Group

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