

Max Messmer, Editor

Rebuilding Your Workforce

As business conditions improve, many managers find themselves rebuilding their accounting teams. To meet accelerating customer demand, they are devoting greater attention to hiring personnel and motivating existing staff. Before taking action, however, organizations must have a clear strategy in mind.

Carefully define your needs

It may be tempting to fill existing vacancies first, but keep in mind that your needs may be entirely different today than they were when the positions became vacant. For instance, rather than replacing the three staff accountants let go during the downturn, resource issues might require you to hire two internal auditors to keep up with Sarbanes-Oxley demands.

Take a look at workload patterns during the last six months to identify vulnerabilities—whether it's a need for certain skills, specialties, or experience levels—and solicit staff input. You may learn that employees have another perspective on the situation. For example, you might expect that senior accountants who covered staff accountant responsibilities after the layoffs are feeling

overburdened and want these roles refilled immediately. But these individuals might instead tell you they recommend the addition of an accounting manager to provide leadership with a growing number of major initiatives.

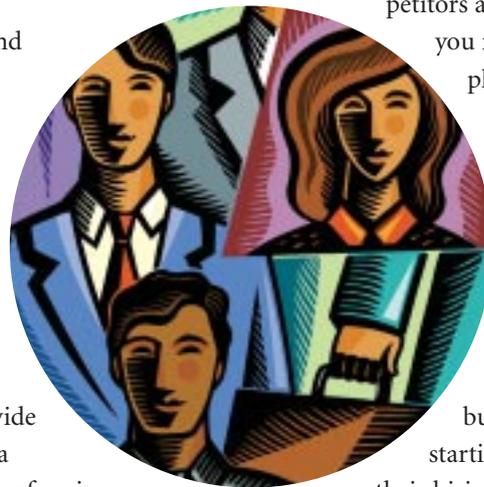
Once you have identified the position(s) to fill, prepare an updated job description. This should include the primary and secondary duties, required experience and education, and the starting salary range. Consider which qualifications and skills are essential for someone to succeed in the position and which are simply

desired. You might need a financial analyst with at least five years of experience, for example, but prefer to hire someone who has previously worked in your industry.

Make the extra effort

If your company is rebuilding its workforce, chances are your competitors are as well. While you may have had applicants go through multiple job interviews in the past, doing so today may cause you to lose top candidates. Many businesses are starting to accelerate their hiring processes and raise salaries, so you may need to do the same during your recruiting process.

Research by our firm shows there will be particular demand this year for individuals with internal auditing, cost accounting, general accounting, credit and collections, financial analysis, or bookkeeping expertise. To find qualified talent,



you might want to expand your strategy beyond online and print ads. Networking at association meetings and contacting recruiters who are well connected in the accounting field can help you reach professionals who may not be actively searching for new employment. Working with a permanent placement firm can also be beneficial if you have limited time to screen applicants and conduct skills assessment tests.

Invest in training

In addition to evaluating your personnel needs, you should also consider your company's training options for existing staff. Think beyond just financial and technology skills, and also consider longer-term goals such as preparing accounting staff for leadership roles. Instruction in communication, business, and management can greatly enhance the team's productivity as well as its ability to collaborate on solving everyday challenges such as improving efficiency and competitiveness. In addition, well-rounded educational programs can be a strong selling point with job candidates who are committed to professional growth.

If your organization doesn't offer internal training opportunities, investigate whether you can provide tuition reimbursement for external courses. Show employees that you are serious about helping them grow professionally by providing the time and resources to build their skills. For instance, you might reassign research responsibilities one month so a tax accountant can attend a public speaking seminar.

Reenergize the team spirit

Finally, recognize that employee

morale likely suffered during the downturn. Remaining staff members may be reevaluating their job prospects now that the market is improving, so you need to take steps to enhance the work environment to retain valued employees.

Praise those who accepted added responsibilities or increased workloads in addition to those who had exceptional achievements. Also reassess salary levels and bonuses to make sure they are competitive by today's standards.

Advancement opportunities can be a particularly valuable motivational tool. By promoting from within, you demonstrate that your staff members' efforts will be recognized with improved career prospects.

Rebuilding a workforce can be an exciting and fulfilling process as you strive to make lasting improvements in your group. Take the time to consider your team's needs carefully, seek input from employees, support professional development, and try to make the work environment more satisfying for existing staff. You will help ensure you have the right people and skills in place for critical business growth ahead. ■

Max Messmer is chairman and CEO of Robert Half International Inc. (RHI), parent company of Robert Half® Finance & Accounting, Accountemps®, and Robert Half® Management Resources. RHI is the world's first and largest specialized staffing firm placing accounting and finance professionals on a full-time, temporary, and project basis. Messmer's most recent books are Motivating Employees For Dummies® and Managing Your Career For Dummies® (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.).