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U.S. headhunters are facing tough times

Headhunters in the USA have known better days. The business was never a self-starter, but those with the necessary expertise, right contacts, and a large list of suitable candidates and applicants, could live quite well off sourcing activities.

Today, however, even renowned sourcing and advisory firms have a much more difficult time finding resources.

One out of 50

One of these professional job brokers with a sound track-record in sourcing logistics experts for air and ocean freight, is Helmut Berchthold. He established the San Diego, California-based agency, adi Management Consult, Inc., in 2001, and has since become a well-known address, nationwide. Yet even this market expert who constantly supplies skilled workers to companies across the United States, reports a dip in sourcing potentials. As an example, he cites a job search for two customs clearance experts requested by companies in Chicago and Los Angeles. *“I contacted 50 potential candidates who, according to my file, were qualified for the job because of their experience and careers. Of those, only three got back to me. At the end of the day, one single expert remained seriously interested.”*

Dire times

Is the disinterest in taking another career step a fear of vocational and social change, a basic attitude of conformity, or is the reason perhaps a high degree of saturation? That depends on each individual, his or her professional goals, the identification with the current employer and, of course, the given family situation, Mr. Berchthold knows from almost 25 years of experience in the sourcing field. However, there are some explanations why job placement is going through dire times in the U.S. right now. First of all: Washington's covid stimulus package. Among others, it is a compensation payment to parents who self-educate their children through home-schooling, as schools were temporarily closed due to COVID-19. This government aid had many women motivated to quit their jobs, realizing that their partner's salary, supplemented by the government bonus package, is sufficient for everyday life. Whether they are only temporarily or permanently lost to the labor market, will only become clear in the medium term, says Helmut Berchthold.

Changed expectations

Then, there is the change in expectations. When discussing new job offers, a growing number of candidates look for a guarantee that their future employer is open to remote work –up to 5 days a week. The fact that

many companies are unwilling or unable to accept this, leaves most candidates unimpressed, says expert Berchtold. This insistence goes hand in hand with expectations for much better pay. The situation is aggravated in the logistics sector, since jobs in this industry are usually extremely stressful with regard to working times and other pressures. This is even more true given that air and ocean transports have gone through the roof since the beginning of the pandemic. The result is permanent physical, psychological, and mental strain for many employees. *“The volume to be handled is simply too much. For example, as many as 84 ships are currently anchored off the Port of Los Angeles alone to unload their cargoes,”* he tells.



Helmut Berchtold is one of California's most distinguished headhunters -photo: private

Herculean task

This puts constant pressure on ground handlers, office people, or dispatchers. At the end of the day, it encourages qualified staff to quit and seek their vocational fortune in less strenuous industries. Finding qualified replacements is sometimes a Herculean task, says headhunter Berchtold.

Most companies that have staffing needs are looking for qualified desk level professionals, rather than candidates for top jobs. However, it is enormously difficult to find suitable people, he emphasizes. This is even more true for regions that are not necessarily social or economic hotspots. For example, logistics company Senator International, recently acquired by the Danish Maersk Group, is building a second air cargo hub in Rockford, IL in addition to Spartanburg, South Carolina. But *“attracting capable people to work in such a remote area is extremely difficult,”* Berchtold says.

Result: the project is currently on hold.

Heiner Siegmund

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