

## **2011, The Year of the Rolling Toolbox**

by Mitch Arnold, CEO and president, Preferred Partners

When I worked in the racing industry, my family and I lived just up the road from Mooresville, NC, where many of the top NASCAR teams maintained their headquarters. At the time, NASCAR was growing from a regional phenomenon to the second most watched sport on television. As race teams looked for an edge, they routinely raided each other's talent, and because so many shops were located in such proximity, it wasn't uncommon to see a racing mechanic pushing his toolbox down the road to his new employer. Sometimes, he would meet a competitor, as they simply switched teams.

2011 will see many top-talent professionals pushing their toolboxes down the street.

Toward the end of 2010, a Manpower survey found that 84% of employees planned to look for new employment opportunities in 2011. In 2009, that number was 60%. If those numbers hold true, and job seekers make the anticipated move, it appears that economic recovery will spawn high levels of professional mobility in 2011.

Employment experts believe that professional mobility is a direct result of more than two years of difficult economic conditions. As companies trimmed their payrolls, they added tasks and responsibilities to their remaining workforces. Because profits were still elusive, many times, the increased demands of employees were not accompanied by increased compensation. That combination leaves a workforce feeling overworked and underappreciated.

Furthermore, the slow economic recovery means that even more firms will downsize or outright shut their doors in the coming years. When top talent senses possible pending doom, they start looking for their next opportunity.

My recruiters have been visiting with frustrated professionals like this for the past couple of years. Though many of them have wanted to make a professional change, they didn't want to expose themselves to the possibility of making a bad move in a bad economy. They would rather toil long, thankless hours than find themselves out of work because they accepted a seemingly better position at a company who suddenly laid them off due to limited financial resources.

As the economy improves and confidence comes back to the private sector, this top talent will swarm to competing opportunities, and that belief is validated through the Manpower survey. The biggest beneficiaries of that trend will be companies with a legitimate need for, and an ability to attract top talent.

Though the talent they desire is more available than in the recent past, companies cannot simply wait for the phone to ring. In addition to being very busy, these employees are still worried that sending their resume out will jeopardize their current employment situation.

A competent recruiter can help make the connection, while ensuring confidentiality on both sides.

A competent recruiter can also help a company position their opportunity to be attractive to a prospective recruit. A prospect has to feel that they aren't jumping out of the frying pan and into the fire. Top talent wants to know that a potential new opportunity is a good fit for their skill set, and that the employer is committed to helping them be successful. These professionals are sharp enough to recognize potential trouble, like management instability and high-employee turnover, where other candidates might not.

In addition to strategically selling themselves to prospective new hires, employers must also beat the competition to these new hires. Passive recruitment strategies, like classified advertising and posting on job boards, will likely put employers at a disadvantage to their competitors who use more aggressive practices like working with an outside recruiting company who will directly solicit these candidates. By the time top talent sees a job posting in the newspaper or on the Web, they're probably already talking to a recruiter.

Those professionals considering a change should update their resumes to include their latest accomplishments and any increased job responsibilities they might have undertaken during the downturn. Resume readers look for quantifiable detail and don't always make the assumptions that candidates anticipate. They should also let their professional and personal network know that they are considering a move, as well as establish or re-establish contact with a trusted recruiter in their area. By doing so, they'll discover the best opportunities before they are published in a public forum, especially since many of the best opportunities are never published.

After two years that challenged even many of the best and strongest companies, 2011 looks to be a year that both top firms and top talent will prosper. Top companies must protect their top performers and attract others at this level, while top talent should make moves that will enhance their professional portfolios and allow them to capitalize on their talents. If these two groups can get together, any lingering pain from the Great Recession will soon disappear.