

Surveys offer optimistic outlook for '97

Is "changing jobs in 1997" one of your New Year's resolutions? If so, two recent surveys suggest you're likely to encounter a pretty healthy job market for at least the first six months of the year.

One survey, which polled 1000 Chief Financial Officers (CFOs), found 43 percent of those polled expect to grow their businesses in 1997. The survey, conducted by Robert Half International, a California headhunter, surveyed service with 150 offices in the U.S., Canada, and Europe, found only 8 percent of respondents forecast any cutbacks.

The survey revealed some variation in projected hiring levels by industry. It was CFOs in the retail, transportation, public utilities, and construction industries who predicted especially strong growth.

Projections also varied somewhat according to the size of the organization responding. CFOs at companies with 50-99 employees anticipated the most active business expansion with 60 percent reporting plans for at least some growth in 1997. "Companies with 50 to 100 employees make up one of the fastest growing and strongest segments of the small business market," noted Max W. Hammer, chairman and CEO of Robert Half International. "Toward expansion plans are geared competition and accommodating internal growth."

Commenting generally on the survey results, Messmer added, "Businesses are optimistic about 1997. This healthy outlook for corporate expansion bodes well for job growth in the year ahead."

A survey that appears to support that optimistic outlook for job growth was conducted by Management Recruiters International (MRI), an Ohio based international recruiting and search firm with offices throughout California. This survey, the 38th in a series conducted by MRI, found an

increase in projected hiring for executive, managerial and professional level positions during the first half of 1997.

According to MRI, of the nearly 2000 executives surveyed, 49.6 percent indicated plans to increase their middle management and/or professional staffs during the first six months of this year. This figure represents an increase of 1.7 points from projections for the last half of 1996, when new hire projections reached what was then the survey's record high of 47.9 percent. An MRI spokesperson says this level of projected new hires is the highest the compa-

ny has seen for these job categories in 16 years of conducting its semi-annual hiring survey.

Of the survey results, MRI's president Alan Schonberg said, "New hires projections for the last half of 1996 reached an historic high, and now that high has been exceeded. Businesses are hiring at an unprecedented rate at a time when the pool of qualified candidates is shrinking. Competition for workers in this segment of the workforce is already tight and promises to become fierce during 1997."

Also worthy of note were the regional differences in projected hiring revealed by the MRI data. The West led the nation in projected hiring increases with 64.5 percent of respondents for the region indicating plans to add to their current ranks. According to MRI, this is the third consecutive hiring survey in which the West emerged as the region with the highest projections. Ranking second and third this time were the Southwest and North Central regions with projected hiring levels of 52.7 percent and 48.8 percent respectively.

Keeping your job search on course

BY DEBORAH L. JACOBS

How long does it take to find a job? One month for each \$10,000 of salary is the stock answer career counselors and head hunters usually give. But in truth, no one can really predict how quickly you'll land the next spot. The longer this tough mission drags on, the greater the risk you'll lose focus or (worse yet) slip into the doldrums. Here are some ways to keep your job search on track:

- **Use more than one job-hunting technique.** Rather than just relying on the want ads, try more individualized methods that don't generate as much competition from other job hunters.

Most people get jobs because they hear about an opening from someone they know. You can start by making a list of friends, family, neighbors and former coworkers. Set a goal to call a certain number of them each day (say, five if you're currently working, and 12 if you're unemployed).

No matter how bummed out you may feel, try to sound upbeat when you call. Highlight your credentials and the kind of job you hope to land (it helps to give a few examples of places where you think you might fit in). Ask everyone you talk with about

giving you the names of other people
in contact.

Another way to up your odds is by getting in touch with businesses directly. The best gateway is not the personnel department, but going through company managers.

Ideally, you'll have leads to them through someone you've already contacted. If not, you might have to make some extra phone calls. For instance, someone with a marketing background would want to find out who's in charge of selling each of the companies' products.

Using index cards or computer software, maintain a log of contacts. You'll want to include the date you spoke, the gist of the conversation, any correspondence that followed, and how you plan to follow up. Send thank-you notes to people who spend a half hour or more talking with you by phone, who meet with you in person, or who refer you to another helpful lead.

- **Stick to a schedule.** Looking for work is a full-time job. If you're still unemployed, you may need to start the day earlier, and end later to make time for phone calls and meetings. You can use evenings and weekends to write letters and do library work — like reading business magazines that

can give you ideas about where to apply.

To ward off the job-hunting blues, people who are out of work should also adopt a routine. That means getting up and going to bed at the same time every day (which helps you sleep better), and using a calendar. At the end of each day, make a realistic list of tasks (in order of priority) you'd like to accomplish on the following one.

If you're conducting a job search from home (as opposed to spending time at an outplacement center), try to set up a work space free from distractions.

- **Build a support system.** Even with all the layoffs in recent years, many people are still ashamed of being unemployed. One way to overcome that is by tapping into a job-support group. Coworkers laid off together have an instant source of camaraderie. Other possibilities are groups forming through churches, synagogues and community organizations. Or, check the phone book for the nearest branch of Forty Plus, a nationwide network for displaced workers.

Finally, when you do land a spot, don't let the contacts go stale. In today's volatile job market, you never know when you'll need them next.

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