The HP Employment Market –
What Every Hiring Manager Should Know

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In the six years that I have been working as a personnel
consultant exclusively for companies that have Hewlett
Packard 3000 computers, I have seen that the managers
who are most successful at attracting and hiring HP
professionals are sensitive to the idiosyncracies of
the HP employment market.   What follows are some of
their best ideas for identifying, interviewing, and
hiring in this unique employment market.   You will get
a complete hiring process that will help you feel
confident that once you   do find someone who can fill
your job requirements, you will have done everything
possible to get an acceptance of your offer.

We will begin with an overview of the HP employment
market and then we will concentrate on specific
guidelines to utilize from the beginning to the end of
your hiring process. We will discuss how to define your
staffing need, how to identify candidates to interview,
and how to conduct the interview itself.   We will
conclude with how to extend an offer in a way that it
will most likely be accepted.

THE HP EMPLOYMENT MARKET

Let's begin our overview of the HP employment market by
identifying it.   Just who is it that looks for a new
job?   What are the reasons people give for leaving their
current employer?

I am sure you have noticed that in some respects, every
person who works in data processing is "in the market".
We all have heard those words: "I'm always interested
in hearing about new opportunities".   I hope for your
sake you don't frequently hear your programmers say
those words into the telephone! But let's separate out
the serious job changers from the "always looking" ones
and see why they are in the market.

Whenever we at Network Systems Company talk with people who are seriously interested in changing jobs, we ask them to tell us the reason they would consider leaving the company they work for at the time. Remember that we only talk with people who work in HP 3000 environments. We log this information in our computer and find that all the reasons we have heard over the years fall into the main reasons shown below.

REASONS FOR CHANGING JOBS

Want more money, salary too low

Candidate relocating

Company or department moving

No career growth, want more responsibility

Company converting to another vendor system

Want a shorter commute

Position boring, want more diversity and projects

Management problems, unclear direction

Losing job due to termination or lay off

For the purposes of this illustration, we are grouping together the reasons sited by ALL levels and types of HP personnel. Please keep in mind that the bulk of the HP employment market consists of applications personnel such as programmers or programmer/analysts. These are the people who most often change jobs and for whom there is the greatest demand.

Which do you think is the reason we hear most often?

Surprisingly, it's not because of low salary or low raises. In fact, that is one of the reasons we hear LEAST often.

Most people who consider themselves "in the market" say the reason is:

" No career growth, want more responsibility "

Managers, please take note. Although this discussion is
not about how to keep your current staff, retaining
your staff is a challenge just as big as hiring is. I
welcome you to use this list of why HP professionals
change jobs as a way to begin a dialog with your staff
on this important subject. If you can improve your
relationship with your staff, you may never need to use
these guidelines on how to hire!

As we look at the actual hiring process, it will be
helpful to keep in mind the following keys for
successful hiring in the HP market.

         FLEXIBILITY * TIMELINESS * PREPARATION

We'll see how each of these plays an important role in
our success at implementing a hiring process that will
result in more "yesses" to our offers.

THE HIRING PROCESS

What are the essential components of the hiring process?

                Identifying the need
                Sourcing candidates
                Interviewing to hire
                Extending the offer

IDENTIFYING THE NEED

The successful hiring managers we talk to always begin
their hiring process with a well thought out job
description. They do not necessarily try to replace
someone who leaves with the same set of skills. They
take the opportunity to evaluate their current staff and
ascertain where there might be in-house skills to fill
the gap.

Remember our reasons for changing jobs? This is a good
time to make sure that anyone who can be promoted or
reassigned to a project gets the opportunity to do so.
You'll eliminate a lot of resentment and a possible
second resignation if you consider your current staff
first, before you hire from the outside.

Take the time to write a job description. We find that
one of the biggest complaints we get from candidates is
that they are not told what they actually will be doing
on a day to day basis.

If we remember that our keys to success in HP hiring, we can see that this first stage in the process requires a great deal of PREPARATION. Your time investment at this stage will be rewarded with successful hires after the interview.

Although I suggest that you have specific requirements for the job, I also recommend FLEXIBILILTY. In this highly competitive HP employment market, you must be willing to accept a combination of skills and total experience, not just specific requirements. Managers who fill their vacancies fastest are willing to interview candidates with backgrounds that come close to their needs. They are in the habit of screening in potential candidates, not screening them out because they do not match the rigid requirements.

SOURCING CANDIDATES

In this competitive market, as manager, you need to be creative in your approach to identify sources of candidates. It will not suffice to merely place an ad in the newspaper, or wait for your personnel department to forward you resumes. The successful hiring managers of the 1990's will be using a variety of sources and will network with as many people as possible on an ongoing basis to be certain that they are always tuned into the market.

Let's brainstorm the ways you can identify people to interview to fill your job openings. These are the ways hiring managers have told me they have sourced candidates:

> Newspaper advertising
> Radio or cable TV advertising
> Job fairs
> Employment agencies/recruiters
> College placement office or computer science department
> User group meetings/conventions
> Personal contacts
> Vendor referrals
> Employee referrals (give bonus)

Our clients tell us that one of the consistently UNSUCCESSFUL ways to identify candidates is through newspaper advertising. I am sure many of you have had successful response to an ad at some point, but our clients tell us they cannot rely on the response. In this unique HP market, there is not a large enough pool of qualified readers to justify the expense in most newspaper geographic markets. The person you need to hire probably is not bothering to read the Sunday want ads anyway.

The college campus is an untapped resource in some areas. If you know that a college in your area is using the HP to teach computer science students, you should get to know the department head and placement office. Many of our clients take college students as interns and then hire them to work in full time positions after graduation.

In sourcing candidates to interview, it helps to be willing to try different methods. Timeliness and preparation count when it comes to the all-important networking at user group meetings, with your vendors, or with recruiters. You can't begin to make contacts in the marketplace _after_ your lead programmer resigns. You need to have known what's out there and what sources you can tap before you actually need them.

Flexibility and timeliness are not attributes typically used to describe personnel departments. If your personnel department's idea of recruiting is only to put an ad in the paper, screen out resumes based on your ideal job requirements, then forward a resume to you two weeks after it was sent in, chances are the candidate has already started working at the HP shop down the road.

The managers who view themselves as successful in their HP hiring either have extraordinarily efficient and cooperative personnel departments who understand this unique market, or they are handling the hiring process almost entirely without personnel.

INTERVIEWING TO HIRE

When you have identified a gem of a candidate for your
staff opening, it is time to prepare for the interview.
There are some very simple things you can do to make
sure that your gem doesn't get so aggravated with the
interview process itself that he is turned off to your
company. If enough of the following "little things" go
wrong, your gem will not want to work for you regardless
of how much you want him or offer him.

Have the personnel interview occur AFTER your
department's interview, if you must have a personnel
interview at all. Your gem doesn't care that his
contribution to the medical plan is $14.10 a month. He
won't be listening attentively enough to remember after
the interview anyway. He wants to find out about you
and the technial environment as quickly as possible.

If by chance you cannot persuade your personnel
department to agree to this sequence, then at the very
least make sure that they see your gem promptly and that
they complete it as quickly as possible.

Don't bother with an application form. If an employment
application must be completed, either let your gem take
it and return it by mail or have him complete it after
your interview. No use having your gem getting
frustrated before your interview trying to remember if
he started that job in February or March of 1980.

Don't keep your candidate waiting. Your gem needs to
feel that your interview with him is important. When
candidates must wait to begin their interview, that is
the first thing they mention to us in the follow-up.
"They made me wait 20 minutes". It's hard to dispel
that resentment.

Try to be uninterrupted during the interview. Even if
you don't mind if your gem hears your users screaming,
he may get the impression that you don't value his time
or have enough control of your time to be left
undisturbed.

Spending time in preparation for the interview and following these pointers will help your gem be predisposed to accepting an offer.

Once you get your gem into your office (and it should be a private office, even if it isn't your own because yours is too messy) the most successful interviews have been well prepared to include the following four phases:

>   Rapport screening
>
>   Fact finding
>
>   Evaluation interview
>
>   Selling

RAPPORT SCREENING

In rapport screening, you set the stage for a productive interview. You want your gem to feel comfortable so that he will be open and honest with you. You should ask friendly, conversational questions about his hobbies and interests. These first couple of minutes are when your gem is going to be getting to know you as well. This is the time for establishing shared experiences. Often we hear things like, "We hit it off right from the start. It turns out that the manager likes to ski as much as I do."

FACT FINDING

After about 10 minutes of rapport screening, you begin to establish if your gem has the credentials to do the job. You will want to ask about what he does in his current position and probe into specific areas of his background to see how they relate to your needs.

As part of the fact finding session, many managers involve another staff member to ask technical questions. This is quite effective providing the other person doesn't duplicate the questions you have asked.

EVALUATION INTERVIEW

If there is one secret to successful hiring, this is it. I guarantee that if you implement this phase of interviewing and ask these three simple questions at this point in the interview, you will be rewarded with some very valuable information. You will be better able to determine if your gem should be made an offer; you will be able to use this information to extend an offer with a greater likelihood of acceptance; and you will be better able to retain your gem once he does come to work for you.

The evaluation interview is your time to get inside your gem's head. It will reveal more about his personality and work ethic than any other type of questions you can ask.

Because of the personal nature of these questions and the fact that you want your gem to be open and honest, it helps to take a break (get a cup of coffee, for example) to make the transition to this phase. I also recommend that you do not take notes during this phase, but rather write notes after the candidate leaves.

For the purposes of this paper, I will present the interpretation of some of the responses along with these questions. During the interview itself, however, I suggest that you keep your focus on the answers your gem is giving and reserve your interpretation of responses until after the interview.

EVALUATION INTERVIEW QUESTION 1

Let's begin the evaluation questions with a topic we have discussed already. Ask:

"Why would you consider leaving your current employer?"

We have already seen the range of possible answers to this question. Let's take a closer look at each of the reasons beginning with these tangible reasons when people are forced to find a new job:

<div style="text-align:center">

Candidate Relocating
Company or department moving
Losing job due to termination or lay off

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Most managers feel comfortable with any of these reasons and in fact find that candidates with these reasons are

the most eager to accept offers. However, if your gem
has lost or will lose his job, be sure to get the
details of the termination. Good HP people are not
usually let go, be certain your gem is the exception.

Continuing with other reasons for leaving:

Want a shorter commute

If your company is significantly closer to your
candidate's home or if it will be an easier commute, you
have one of the best motivators for changing jobs. In
fact, even people who would not ordinarily listen to
other opportunities become receptive to an opening that
is closer to home. Of course we need not mention the
benefits to you of having your staff members living
close by.

Company converting to another system

If your gem is upset that his company is replacing their
HP system with another vendor's system, this should be
music to your ears. It demonstrates that your candidate
knows and loves the HP and would rather switch companies
than fight the new vendor. Incidentally, this kind of
"vendor loyalty" is very common in the HP marketplace
despite the popular notion that everyone would rather
work on IBM.

Want more money, salary too low

This reason makes most managers nervous and indeed it
should. The candidate who says money is his primary
motivator for changing jobs is probably not the one you
want to hire. If you hire this type, you will always
wonder if you are giving him high enough raises (and our
research shows that these people NEVER think they are
being paid enough).

The reasons you will hear most often are the intangible
ones that remain:

Position boring, want more diversity and projects
No career growth, want more responsibility
Management problems, unclear direction

The savvy hiring manager hears out the candidate's
complaints in any of these areas. These refer to the
way your candidate perceives his work environmnent.
With these emotional issues, you can see that this
information will help you shape your subsequent comments
to your candidate in terms that will "feel" positive and
that he will view as an improvement over his current
situation. I'll show you exactly how when we get to the
later phases of the interview process.

EVALUATION INTERVIEW QUESTION 2

"What do you want out of your work?"

This is where you will hear about your gem's plans for
his future. Can he verbalize some long term goals?
Does he know what he wants? It will be hard for you to
keep him happy if he doesn't even know what it is that
he wants. If he does tell you some plans that could fit
into your department's future, we willl see how you can
use this information later to "sell" the job to him.

EVALUATION INTERVIEW QUESTION 3

"What effort would you be willing to put forth to
achieve what you want?"

Listen for a response that relates to commitment. Your
gem should have some idea of what it takes to achieve
the success he seeks. Often this response will be
conveyed in specific time elements such as, "I would be
willing to work 12 hour days to complete a project ahead
of schedule so that I could be promoted to a Project
Leader position."

EVALUATION INTERVIEW SUMMARY

Those three little questions will give you a great
insight into your potential hire's level of commitment,
his career goals, and his emotional ties to his
workplace. We will use the responses to these questions

again later in the hiring process but before we move on, please allow me to make one more suggestion on the evaluation interview.

Once you have hired your gem, I suggest you refer to your notes on this phase of the interview frequently. If you are continuing to provide an environment where your employee is getting what he wants out of work and is able to achieve his goals as given in responses to Questions 2 and 3, you will improve your odds of keeping him longer. An added benefit is that as your staff realizes that you care about their career development and that you are committed to helping them achieve their goals, you will gain a loyalty that is normally unheard of in the data processing profession.

Let's move now to finishing up your interview. We have come to the fourth and final phase of the interview:

SELLING

Many hiring managers have told me that this was the hardest phase of the interview to master, but the rewards in terms of successful hires are worth it.

You begin this phase by telling your gem about your job opening, emphasizing those aspects you garnered will be important to him based on the evaluation interview. You can see why it would be foolish to discuss the details of the job before you had this valuable information.

Here's an example:

You learn from the evaluation interview that your gem wants to leave his current employer because he feels bored and doesn't feel that he's involved in any projects. Even if your opening is for a programmer to maintain your canned financial package, you should include some mention of a project. Think of something on your "To Do" list. Is there some piece of it that an eager new hire could do? Probably, so mention it in terms of being a project:

"You will be involved in a project to track user complaints and make recommendations for ways to streamline the problem-solving process."

Your gem will hear a specific thing about your job that he can distinguish as being better than his current job. He must be able to make this distinction in order to accept your offer.

In this selling phase, you must also be prepared to open up about yourself. Your gem will not work for you unless he feels comfortable with you. This is the place to discuss your own background including how long you have worked there, why you joined the company, and what you like about the company.

You might be surprised at how important this is. When we surveyed all the candidates we placed in new HP jobs over the past six years, they sited the <u>personality and skill level of the hiring manager</u> as a major motivation for accepting the job offer. If you're not letting your gem get to know <u>you</u> in the interview, you're missing a great "selling" opportunity.

Be enthusiastic about your company. You can't assume that your gem knows anything about your company. You must be able to state at least one clear reason why your gem should go to work for your company. Your enthusiasm will be contagious. He will recognize and begin to feel a pride in being able to work for your company.

EXTENDING THE OFFER

Let's move ahead now and say that your gem really proved to be a gem in the end. If you like him and think you might want to hire him, you must move toward making the offer immediately.

Remember that we said that successful hiring in the HP market required TIMELINESS. Here's a case of that. This is not a market where you have the luxury of spending three weeks interviewing and another two weeks deciding who to hire. The HP managers who are most successful in their hiring are willing to make an offer to the first candidate they interview. You should know enough about the skills and personality you need before the interview to make a decision quickly after the interview when someone is right.

In determining the appropriate salary to offer, you need to pay as much (or as little, depending on your perspective) as necessary to get your gem to accept. In the HP market, most managers tell me they would rather offer slightly higher than the minimum acceptable. That is a wise approach when you have the attitude that you want your gem not only to work for you, but to come to work happily. It has been our experience that your gem will be more eager to start work quickly and has a better chance of staying with you longer if he doesn't feel that you were frugal in your initial offer.

If you take the responsiblility for keeping in tune with the market, you should always have an idea of what the "going rate" for a particular position is in your geographic area. There will be times, however, when you will want to hire a person that has an unusual blend of technical skills that would make him extremely beneficial to your department. In that case, you must not hesitate to pay a higher salary than you had expected. That extra couple of thousand dollars will be recovered quickly in training costs and immediate productivity in your department. Determining salaries in this market requires FLEXIBILITY.

One final point about salaries. If you or your personnel departments are using any national data processing salary surveys for a reference in determining salaries in your HP department, throw them in the garbage. Our specialized market defies the national averages. If you can't get a salary survey based on the HP market itself, you can guage salary ranges by asking any candidates you interview for their salary history, not just current salary. From that you can see what other companies have paid for different levels of experience over the past years and you can compare it with your staff salaries.

Once you have determined the salary, you need to contact your gem to give him the good news. The managers who get most of their offers accepted either extend the offer themselves or have a well-trained third party do it.

The best offers are made when the call is made to your gem at home and parts of the selling phase of the interview are reiterated. This is also the place where you want to feed back to your gem that valuable information you gathered in the evaluation interview

phase (which he will have forgotten that he told you). Here's an offer that will most likely be accepted:

"We were most impressed with the experience you have in maintaining financial applications in COBOL. We feel that we could help you develop those skills further by involving you with our manufacturing systems and special projects like the one I discussed during the interview. Over the next couple of years, we expect to expand our MIS department and hope that you would be someone who could eventually take on additional responsibilities.

"Would you be interested? [By asking this now, you save yourself the embarrassment of making an offer to someone who is no longer interested.]

"Great! Then it is my pleasure to offer you the job at a salary of $30,000 plus the benefits we discussed. You will be eligible for a salary increase of up to 10% in 6 months. When can we look forward to you starting?"

Do you notice how we keep "selling" through the offer? And again, how the information from the evaluation interview gets reworded and used to paint a positive picture of what our gem wants? We present the biggest offer we can and be sure to mention benefits and raises. If you can make your offer like this as the culmination of a well-prepared hiring process, your efforts will be rewarded with an enthusiastic new staff member.

We have talked about how your success as a hiring manager in this highly competitive HP employment market requires that you use use flexibility, timeliness, and preparation in your hiring process. Using the guidelines for identifying your staffing need, sourcing HP candidates, interviewing to hire with the evaluation interview, and extending the offer will help make certain that the person you want to hire will want to work for you.