

Executive **EDGE**

RECRUITING FORMER EMPLOYEES

In these times of economic growth, many businesses are struggling with a shortage of skilled labor. As a result, more companies are actively recruiting former employees who left for other jobs—a group known as “boomerang” employees.

Many of these boomerang employees come back at a higher level if they’ve accrued valuable experience in their time away. Others return to their former positions at roughly the same salary level they had before. “In many ways they are treated like new employees,” says Philip Nardone, president of PAN Communications. “Except they already know the ropes and can hit the ground running, as opposed to new employees who have to get oriented.”

Several other advantages also exist when hiring former employees. Most importantly, their return sends a positive message to remaining employees that perhaps the grass isn’t always greener on the other side. One possible problem, however, is the risk of alienating loyal employees who resent the promotions and raises given to returning coworkers. Nardone admits that it’s up to the boomerang hire to “quickly prove to the team that he or she deserves that title.”

Karen Morgan, vice-president for Management Recruiters International, has several tips for the executive interested in pursuing former employees.

- *Get up to date.* Before interviewing former staffers, find out what skills they may have developed since leaving the firm. Also, find out which aspects of working for your company they might have missed elsewhere.



- *Learn the cause for leaving.* If employees left for specific reasons, discover whether those factors still exist. If they do, re-hires are going to leave again—sooner or later.

- *Stay in touch.* E-mail is an excellent way to keep in touch with valued former employees—especially if used to let them know of changes and improvements in the company. In addition, don’t hesitate to contact them directly if opportunities that might interest them develop in the organization.

However, states Morgan, realize that if you contact a former employee first, a little of your bargaining power may be lost.

From Anne Marie Borrego, “Better the Hire You Know,” Inc., July 2000, pp. 125-126.

CONFUSION ABOUT “BUSINESS CASUAL”

In 1997 Development Counselors International (DCI), a New York City marketing firm, expanded its casual dress policy from Fridays-only to five days a week. “There was a general assumption,” says Robert DeRocker, the firm’s executive vice president, “that employees would share the same definition of what ‘business casual’ meant.”

They did not. Clothing choices got so wild—including ripped jeans, gym wear, and tube tops—that DCI’s managers soon felt compelled to develop an official dress code and insert it in the employee handbook.

DCI’s experience mirrored that of countless other U.S. companies. Business casual has become nearly univer-

sal, but few business people seem to agree on what it means.

Fashion experts offer general guidelines: conservative sport coat, collared shirts, flannel or gabardine trousers for men; pantsuits or tailored pants with a sweater set for women. Meanwhile, individual employers have come up with guidelines of their own:

- Clik Communications, a New York City company, allows employees to use their own judgment in dressing for business occasions—but does insist that they include underwear.

- Kennedy-Wilson International, a Los Angeles real-estate firm, recently adopted a policy of business casual (meaning, for men, conservative shirts with collars) Monday through Thursday and

out-and-out casual (Hawaiian shirts allowed) on Friday.

- J. P. Morgan, the New York City investment bank, simply calls its dress policy “business-appropriate.” Kristin Lemkau, a Morgan vice president, says, “We pay our people a lot of money for their judgment, so we leave it up to them.”

- Powell Goldstein Fraser & Murphy, a law firm with offices in Atlanta and Washington, DC, has gone so far as to hold “fashion shows” in which partners model pieces of clothing (e.g., shorts and sandals) that the firm will not allow employees to wear on the job.

From Anne Field, “What Is Business Casual?” Business Week, October 30, 2000, pp. 180-190.

JOURNAL OF THE CATHOLIC HEALTH ASSOCIATION OF THE UNITED STATES

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