

Personnel consultant offers different approach to finding staff

Peter Carino, Wire Resources, Inc., an industry headhunter with decades of experience, shares his thoughts on the employment situation related to Covid-19. He can be contacted at tel. 203-622-3000 or cell 203-962-2001, pcarino@wireresources.com or at linkedin.com/in/petercarino1.

WJI: You've been a recruiter in the wire and cable industry for decades: just how unique is this Covid-19 driven period the industry is going through?

Carino: Speaking from an economic standpoint, the catalyst and speed of its effect is unprecedented. The .com bust, 9/11, and the Great Recession all had individuals or bubbles you could blame. This is a health crisis that caused millions of people to become unemployed overnight and many millions more working remotely on a global scale.



Peter Carino

Eliminating face-to-face interaction on all levels has never happened, let alone in an instant, but people will always be creative. For example, I had a client institute a no-visitor policy while a job candidate was traveling to their facility for a scheduled interview. Everyone adjusted and it became a conference call via his cell phone sitting in his car in the company parking lot. I have another candidate who is being considered for an executive role at a U.S.-based cable manufacturer. The European parent company would like to do a face-to-face interview with this executive. However, there is still a 14-day quarantine associated with international travel, so that meeting may become virtual. That's something else that has never happened previously.

WJI: Is hiring still going on? If so, at what level(s), and is it being done differently?

Carino: There are many companies cutting and/or adjusting to their current level of sales volume. However, I've spoken with several industry executives in essential markets that have been able to fill some of their historically most difficult hires. Not necessarily senior level, but positions vital to any manufacturing organization. Positions like machine operators and various engineers. The mid-to-senior level openings I personally have been working on are critical hires, otherwise they would be on hold. As for what's different, more extensive video interviews are the current norm. Typically, there are two or three people on the call interviewing a candidate initially. I have been recommending to clients that they do a one-on-one video if the process moves forward. The exchange will be more responsive, deeper and revealing to both parties. I have also done a few video reference checks for the first time in my career. I found people to be more candid and open to providing specific details when vetting a particular key skill set a company may seek.

WJI: Which sectors looks strongest and which look weakest at this point?

Carino: Manufacturers of cables/assemblies for defense, utility and medical are doing better than most. Redistributors that maintain high levels of cables in stock and can ship same day are finding opportunities as well.

WJI: When it comes to cutting budgets, do you see companies starting with or avoiding staff reductions?

Carino: Both. It's never easy to let good employees go, but in many cases that's what is happening currently. We're not talking waves of cuts over an extended period of time. Layoffs have not ended, and some very accomplished professionals were let go right off the bat. Again, I've never seen that happen in this short period of time in previous downturns.

Many companies do their best to avoid layoffs. If the company balance sheet is under substantial stress, they are not letting people go, but they are making tough, across-the-board concessions. They're cutting bonuses and 401k matches, postponing salary reviews, instituting furlough days, etc. The only thing that makes this a little easier for someone who is laid off is that everyone understands the problem, so no one is pointing a finger or talking about who or what should have been done to prevent it.

WJI: Will some individuals and companies look at this as a time of opportunity?

Carino: There are definitely some key industry professionals that are gainfully employed but receptive to a change for a number of reasons. Additionally, I'm working with a few highly regarded cable executives that are unemployed for the first time in their career. They are interviewing with cable manufacturers that would not have them as potential candidates if we were not in this current situation.

Obviously, there are more candidates available right now, but it's not like there are greater numbers of professionals with wire and cable expertise. That total number is the same, and it will actually decline as more people from the cable sector find employment in other industries.

I believe that the cable industry has experienced a net loss of talent in previous downturns. More people with a wire and cable background leave our business then enter it from other industries. Regardless of market conditions, you still need to hire someone who is truly a match for your opening. You must also consider, would your chosen candidate be happy in the role had the pandemic not occurred? After all, you want to do more than just fill a spot.