

EMPLOYMENT GUIDE

No degree? No experience? No problem.

Paul Davidson
USA TODAY

Do you have good people skills? Drive? A clean shirt?

You're hired!

Employers are loosening job requirements amid the most severe worker shortages in recent memory. In many cases, they're hiring candidates with no experience and training them to fill in the gaps as long as they have the aptitude and soft skills such as a knack for communicating well and working hard.

"Fairly quickly, people have started to realize they have to come off their wish list," says Dawn Fay, senior district president of the Northeast for staffing firm Robert Half. "They need to in order to hire."

Eighty-eight percent of businesses say they're bringing on candidates who have strong soft skills and then providing job-specific training, according to a Harris Poll survey of 2,100 employers for CareerBuilder conducted March 31-April 23. In 2019, just 62% of employers had hired candidates who lacked the required skills and trained them, CareerBuilder says.

Accounting firms are hiring auditors with financial training but no auditing experience, Fay says. Call centers are tapping receptionists and other customer service professionals. And various types of companies are targeting old-school marketing specialists who have no digital background to run their social media campaigns.

Flexible about job candidates

Employers have little choice but to be more flexible. Job openings hit a record 8.1 million in March, according to the Labor Department. And last month, a record 44% of small business owners said they had job openings they couldn't fill, according to a survey by the National Federation of Independent Business.

The labor crunch is roiling the economy despite a still-elevated 6.1% unemployment rate as the nation continues



Roland Statulevicius developed an interest in appraising after taking photos of houses for a friend in the industry and decided to switch careers. PROVIDED

to emerge from the coronavirus downturn. Economists have partly blamed enhanced jobless benefits that may encourage some people to stay on unemployment rather than return to work. And about 3.5 million Americans are still not working or looking for jobs because they fear contracting COVID-19 or are caring for sick relatives or children distance-learning from home.

Those hurdles could soon become less imposing. About 40% of the population has been fully vaccinated, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and most are expected to be inoculated within a month. Schools are reopening.

Meanwhile, though, many companies are scrambling to staff up.

Some businesses relaxed job requirements in the latter part of the last decade and in early 2020 as unemployment sank to a 50-year low of 3.5% just before the pandemic set off the worst-ever recession. But Fay says employers are going to even greater lengths now to accommodate employees with rough edges because customer demand is re-

bounding so quickly even as the supply of workers remains suppressed.

"It's the perfect storm," she says. Many firms, she says, are still listing a full slate of job qualifications in initial ads but then bending them for hires.

'Absolutely zero experience'

Illinois manufacturers are bringing on workers with no experience, in many cases even if they fail a marijuana test, and dropping a requirement for a high school diploma or the equivalent, says Lori Gajdzik, branch manager of an Express Employment Professionals franchise in Crystal Lake, Illinois. She has never seen companies ditch the education standard, she says.

"They're taking people that have absolutely zero experience," she says. "They're taking people from McDonald's."

Michael Hobbs, president of Chicago-based PahRoo Appraisal & Consultancy, traditionally has only hired licensed appraisers with five to 10 years of experience. But after posting open-

ings for three appraisers for months, Hobbs got one application, compared with his usual 15 to 30 per opening.

Part of the problem, he says, is that data analysis, technology and business intelligence firms are also struggling to find workers and many are snapping up appraisers.

Word-of-mouth instead of postings

So Hobbs has stopped posting job ads online and insisting on appraisal credentials.

Instead, he relies on word-of-mouth and LinkedIn and asks business associates, "Do you know people who like solving puzzles?" He also has applicants take a "culture index" test to determine if they have the aptitude and personality to fit in with his firm. He's now drawing about 15 to 20 applicants per opening.

New hires, he says, are doing research on a neighborhood's income and other demographics while they train to be appraisers, easing the workload for the company's licensed appraisers. They're earning \$30,000 to \$40,000, not the \$70,000 to \$200,000 licensed appraisers rake in but they have a pathway into the industry.

"We've opened up the funnel," he says.

A couple of months ago, Hobbs hired Roland Statulevicius, 58, as a trainee. He had worked as a BMW liaison with dealers and importers in his native Lithuania and set up a car dealership in the Chicago area when he arrived in the U.S. about two years ago. But he developed an interest in appraising after taking photos of houses for a friend in the industry and decided to switch careers.

He took online classes and earned certifications - and his license this month - but landing a job at an appraisal company with no formal experience normally would have been difficult.

"It would take much more time," Statulevicius says. "Michael helped me."

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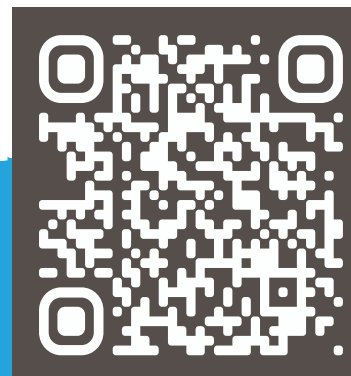
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