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Do you have what it takes?

What employers are looking for in senior HR executives

By Lisa Ludmer - *Director of Permanent and Professional Placement, Adecco Canada*

With a tightening labour force and looming baby boomer retirements, the focus of HR is now firmly on talent management, which means HR executives need to have experience in succession planning and retention, according to Lisa Ludmer, director of permanent and professional services at Adecco Canada in Toronto.

While recruiting the right people is important, that task will fall more to junior HR professionals while vice-presidents and directors of HR will focus more on keeping top talent because good recruits will be few and far between, she says.

“You’re only given one or two candidates for each job, so it’s harder,” says Ludmer. “They’re really concerned about the retention of employees.”

Because of the strategic nature of succession planning and the need to ensure an organization has the right people to meet future business needs, employers are increasingly looking for HR executives with more business experience and possibly even an MBA.

“They’re taking on more of a business analyst role,” says Ludmer.

Employers are also looking for HR executives who are problem solvers and can adapt to the changing market, she adds.

HR executives will also need a strategy for attracting foreign-trained professionals and helping them relocate to Canada as homegrown talent becomes sparser, says Ludmer.

“We just don’t have the talent here in Canada. If we don’t have them, we have to think creatively and out-of-the-box about how we’re going to get them,” she says. “International recruiting is going to be increasingly important.”

Business savvy, openness to international recruiting and relocation, a business and strategic mindset combined with industry-specific knowledge will all help put an HR executive candidate over the top, says Ludmer.

On their way to getting there, HR professionals will have to step up and ask to become part of the business and strategic planning in the organization, she says.

“If you don’t ask, you don’t get, so you have to take the initiative.”