

## Help wanted: Must be multitalented

Third-party logistics and technology companies are hiring supply chain professionals right now. If you want to get their attention, then you'll need to be familiar with a wide range of functions, says recruiter Don Jacobson.



**ECONOMISTS SAY** we're in a "jobless recovery"—the economy is rebounding yet we're not seeing a commensurate increase in employment. But according to Don Jacobson, one of the top recruiters in the supply chain field, that doesn't seem to apply to the supply chain job market. So far, the hiring outlook for supply chain professionals looks brighter this year than last, says Jacobson, who heads up Optimum Supply Chain Recruiters, a specialist in finding talent for third-party logistics companies (3PLs).

Before becoming a professional recruiter, Jacobson managed operations, customer service, and supply chain functions at Corning Glass Works. For the past 28 years, he has been involved in recruiting and placing supply chain executives throughout North America. He has been a member of the Council of Supply Chain Management Professionals (CSCMP) for more than 25 years.

Jacobson regularly shares his knowledge and experience by writing articles for such publications as *DC Velocity* magazine, *CSCMP Supply Chain Comment*, and *The WERC Sheet*, published by the Warehousing Education and Research Council (WERC).

In a recent interview with Editor James Cooke, Jacobson discussed the current hiring outlook for supply chain professionals, including what makes a candidate attractive to employers and where the jobs are these days.

### opening up in the supply chain field?

We have seen more than a 30-percent increase in opportunities as compared to the first quarter of last year. With companies still running so lean, we expect this level of activity to continue to grow throughout the year.

Still, understaffed Human Resources departments are hard-pressed and at times under-qualified to meet the demand for new, specialized hires. The time it takes from when someone submits a résumé to when he or she is hired has increased over the last few years.

### Are there any particular areas where companies are recruiting supply chain professionals—logistics or procurement, for instance?

There has been a tremendous amount of activity [recently] in hiring individuals in business development, and the competition for these people is very strong. This is usually a precursor to hiring in the engineering and operations areas. Procurement has remained a hot area, as companies of all sizes are looking at taking a strategic approach with new [software] systems and utilizing multisource hiring on a global level.

Third-party logistics companies are also looking to diversify their [product and service] offerings. But they do not have the right people in place to make that happen, and they have to go to the outside to find the right people.

### Are there any industries that are hiring more supply chain professionals than others right now?

As the shift to outsourcing continues, the service providers, technology companies, and software companies seem to be hiring at a higher level. And although we have finally seen the *Fortune* 500 companies opening up their hiring, it is the small to medium-size companies that are experiencing the most growth.

### What background or qualifications make a supply chain professional stand out from the crowd?

Of course you need to have at least a bachelor's degree. In addition, companies that are hiring are combining more than one position and are looking for candidates with multiple areas of expertise. It is important to do what you can to get cross-functionally trained in several areas of your company's supply chain.

It is important to realize that initial screening [of job applicants] has been pushed off to Human Resources, so the standard requirements stated in the job description have become a "go/no-go" test when the résumé is reviewed. For example, all the experience you have may not substitute for a degree. If your résumé does not have the key words that are in the company's job description, then there is a good chance that you will not be considered. ... Unfortunately, the "soft" skills that are a major component of success are many times not taken into consideration.

### Are there any particular certifications that hiring companies are seeking in supply chain candidates?

Depending on the position that a person is looking for, certification is becoming more and more important. APICS certification, CPIM (Certified in Production and Inventory Management), Six Sigma, and Lean, plus warehouse management systems, transportation management systems, and SAP knowledge are all in demand and are included in the job descriptions.

Companies are no longer willing to train new recruits in the most common business tools. They want candidates who can hit the ground running. Continuing your education is always a benefit to your career.

### What's the employment outlook for students who are now graduating with supply chain management degrees?

Although we do not specialize in the placement of recent graduates, when we do speak to them, we advise them to

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**CSCMP MEMBER:** more than 25 years

take advantage of as many internship programs as they can, whether paid or unpaid. We also advise them to get very involved in both the local and national chapters of industry associations that are related to the supply chain area they want to specialize in.

The recent graduate needs to explore all available options: job boards, recruiters, company websites, social networking, alumni groups, job fairs, and even traditional print media. Any opportunity to gain experience should be explored and followed if it makes sense and advances the candidate's network and career.

### How important is international experience in landing the top supply chain job these days?

Of course it depends on the company and its global exposure. However, those that have this experience will have an edge over the candidates that do not have this experience.

### If you could give one piece of advice to a supply chain professional in regard to moving up the career ladder, what would that be?

I can't do justice to this question with just one piece of advice. I would always have a résumé ready and updated, even if you are not in the market [for a new job]. I would develop a relationship with select, specialized recruiters and maintain a dialogue with them, even if it is only once every six months. Keep learning cross-functionally, and get involved in associations to strengthen your network.

The ability to perform multiple functions adds value when covering multiple responsibilities or working on special projects. The most successful companies traditionally have rotated new employees through multiple career paths to prepare them for future promotions. Although this practice has diminished somewhat, you can volunteer to participate in projects in other departments to get the experience needed to round out your background. △