

## Cherry Pick Top Talent Away from Rivals

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**The scenario:** With nearly every industry announcing layoffs and closings, high-caliber talent is up for grabs.

**The tactic:** Employ savvy recruiting tactics to poach A players from competitors.

Most Fortune 1000 companies keep a running list of top senior-level talent in their industry — people they would most like to hire if opportunity came knocking. Surprise: In many industries laboring through recession and cutbacks, now's the time. With jobs in shorter supply and salaries flatlined, companies in a position to add headcount can lock in great talent. What are the keys to recessionary poaching? Here are four tactics that experts consider crucial.

**Time your tactics.** Getting the timing right and going aggressive at the first sign of trouble can be critical factors in making timely hires. When aircraft makers Cessna and Hawker Beechcraft announced in November that hundreds of employees would be laid off at their Wichita, Kansas, plants, Florida-based rival [Piper Aircraft](#) saw a prime opportunity to scoop up talent. Piper quickly organized a job fair, but not in Florida. The company brought recruiters to the Wichita Airport Hilton in hopes of attracting both employed and laid-off workers from Cessna and Hawker Beechcraft to its Vero Beach, Fla. operation.

**Forget headhunters — use the Web.** Companies looking to pick up talent also need to think strategically about using the Web to recruit. Build an online relationship with coveted employees before calling or interviewing, says John Sullivan, a management professor at San Francisco State University and CEO of HR firm [Dr. John Sullivan & Associates](#). Many A-list employees aren't actively looking to switch jobs. Hiring them requires a sustained effort to market the company online as the place, like [Google](#) and Facebook, where the best and brightest work. "A top performer will always want to learn," says Sullivan.

**Turn employees into recruiters.** An easy way to boost a company's Web reputation is to turn key employees into Web-savvy evangelists who blog, post in forums, and generally make the company look smart. At shoe and apparel retailer [Zappos](#), more than 400 employees, including recruiters, now use Twitter to broadcast up-to-the minute updates on their days — ultimately hoping to convince talent at stuffier companies that life at Zappos is better. Recruiters at [Sodexo](#), a growing \$7.3 billion food services and facilities management company, use Facebook, YouTube videos ("[A day in the life of a Sodexo employee](#)"), LinkedIn, and blogging to help potential recruits get to know the company.

**Don't cave to the impulse to bargain-shop.** That's not to suggest any of this is easy or quick. It's tempting to try to pay less for talent, especially when out-of-work employees have the disadvantage in negotiations. But hiring the candidate who agrees to the smallest salary could backfire when the economy bounces back and that employee starts to look for a better opportunity elsewhere.

If financing is a problem, forgo upfront signing bonuses. Instead, offer restricted stock grants and promise more for the future, based on performance.

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