

Small cos give fresh lease to 'discarded' talent

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NEW DELHI: If the slowdown has been bad news for large companies, it has meant opportunity for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in their talent hunt. Little wonder then, SK Sharma, group director —HR of Premier Shield, a medium-sized security solutions company, is a happy man. In the past three months, the Delhi-based firm has hired 12 executives at middle- and senior-manager levels from the likes of Unitech, Vishal Retail, Nucleus Software, Park Hotels and Trident Hotels — big companies in real estate, retail, IT and hospitality sectors. Interestingly, these executives have joined Premier at salaries 30-50% lower than what they drew in their previous companies that had laid them off. Mr Sharma is among a growing tribe of recruiters from mid-sized enterprises operating in sectors that are rather insulated from the slowdown and are having the last laugh by hiring senior executives from slowdown-hit big firms. "It's a good situation for us as these executives come with experience and well networked in big companies to help us grow our business," says Mr Sharma. Girish Bhandari (name changed on request), is one such employee. A 38-year-old former DGM, customer relations at a Unitech project, he moved to Premier Shield at the same position with a 50% pay-cut after being asked to leave. His Rs 12-lakh annual package at Unitech has been halved, but he can't complain.

"It's a matter of survival for people like us," says Mr Bhandari, the father of a 10-year-old son, also the sole earning member of the family. Large-scale layoffs and a surge of talent in the market has led to it being employer-driven. The extent of salary cuts that people are willing to take varies from case to case.

Another area where companies, particularly start-ups, are benefiting is internships. Vinculum Capital partners, a one-year old investment bank, has, in fact, got an intern from IIM-K to work for them without any major cost. "This is the best time for start-ups for picking up talent," says Samresh Kumar, founder, Vinculum Capital and an ex-IIT and IIM graduate.

With heavyweights across sectors laying off people, small and medium-sector enterprises have got access to this talent pool. Some of the beneficiaries of this phenomenon include Amada, a Japanese equipment manufacturer, IMS, a leading coaching institute, Federation of Indian Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, and others in that space who are drawing talent from Unitech, Voltas, Godrej and other such big firms.

Amada, for instance, has hired 4-5 such professionals in the past two weeks with four years of experience from companies that are over Rs 10,000 crore in size. These people, says the firm, have come on board at a 60% lower salary. Similarly, IMS has picked up 10-15 people from sectors like banking and financial services, retail and hundreds of job requests from fresher from IIMs in the past 4-5 months.

Analysts and executive search firms say there's a clear trend of people across levels and sectors eyeing the small and medium-sector companies. These are those employees who are shunning bigger brands as they see signs of a bleak future, either because of shelved projects or cost-cutting measures. Consequently, they are searching for firms that are still growing. "Smaller companies lacked quality talent, but not ambition," says **Ronesh Puri, MD, Executive Access**, which has got 1,000 CVs in the past three months from people seeking opportunities in small and medium companies. "Hence, its turning out to be a win-win situation for both professionals and firms as they get options that are majorly linked to their performance."