

schedules that adapt to the changes in workforce needs. The demographics of today's employee market have changed forever as the diversity of society is seen in growing percentages of designers. Included in this are the growing legions of working mothers and/or single mothers and fathers. This has increased the need for day-care facilities or services that firms can help subsidize or pay for as a benefit to talented employees. A new responsibility that is beginning to emerge is the care of elderly parents by firm employees, which has created a new benefit for employees called elder care. As the demographics change, so must the benefits a firm offers.

Six key HR issues have significant effects on a design firm's personnel and are becoming the main differentiators in the marketplace today.

1. ***Increasing rules and regulations.*** Understanding and setting up policies regarding government-mandated regulations and programs is an important piece of HR and the firm's business. Policies on workplace hazards such as discrimination, sexual harassment, or illegal use of the Internet are no longer considered merely "nice to have"; they are a necessity because of the growing enforcement of laws that carry harsh penalties if the firm does not follow them.
2. ***Mobile/temporary workforce.*** Because the market cannot provide enough talent, firms are hard pressed to operate in traditional ways, and new ideas of how a firm operates are developing. Alternative, virtual work environments that are created through remote locations and telecommuting are being added to a firm's arsenal of flexibility, which may also offer flex-time schedules. Another increasing area of employment is the temporary or contingent employee. These talented individuals move from project to project and from firm to firm, where they enjoy flexibility, variety, and learning opportunities that make this type of free agent a valuable commodity in the marketplace.
3. ***Workforce diversity.*** It is no longer a competitive advantage just to adapt to cultural diversity in the design firm; the firm must learn how to capitalize on it. Since the firm is consciously or subconsciously competing on a global scale, having a diverse workforce could be the key to growth that a firm has never had the opportunity to explore before.
4. ***Change management.*** A proper HR strategy provides vision for how the firm will move strategically through change, and also provides a plan of action that can be implemented. In today's fast-moving, highly connected

work environment, highly touted HR initiatives must be easily implemented. There is nothing worse than a HR change that is announced with great fanfare, only to have nonaction doom the initiative to failure.

5. **Work life.** The design firm of today must be acutely “life friendly,” meaning that in order to attract top talent, the design firm’s scheduling and general operating policies must take into reasonable account the personal needs of employees outside the work environment.
6. **Technology.** By streamlining the administrative aspects of HR, technology has been a positive development for many tasks, such as resumé screening, posting of jobs, and e-mail communications between personnel. However, many issues that are design specific, such as employee portfolio management, project measurements, and flexible scheduling, are lacking in today’s software offerings. The Internet is bringing affordable HR options to our industry as application service providers (ASP) are offering corporate-class solutions as a pay-as-you-go subscription model for our industry’s smaller-sized firms. This means that the traditional large expense of implementing corporate-class technology by one entity can be shared by many subscribers, lowering the cost.

For the design firm, then, these six challenges can be met with a HR policy that carefully and comprehensively accounts for getting, keeping, and benefiting from good employees: recruiting, hiring, development, retention, compensation, and communication.

RECRUITING AND HIRING

Profitable and healthy design firm HR practices begin with smart hiring. When design firms recruit, interview, hire, and train people who should not have been hired anyway, they lose time and money and waste effort. No design professionals want to spend the bulk of their time each day putting out fires. Unfortunately, because of bad hiring, many managers and designers spend their time as firefighters rather than as strategic thinkers, planners, and designers. Design firms can avoid hiring the wrong people, but only if