the firm follows a strict process that involves identifying needs, allowing flexibility, and requiring technological competence.

Before starting the hiring process, the design firm should ask itself what kind of position it is asking the market to fulfill. This seems simple, but most design firms stick by the traditional methods of hiring by posting a job description that places a person into a supervised routine based on a set of job specs. Because the design office has changed so much over the past few years, this traditional approach misses three main issues of the "new economy" design office.

1. A job description no longer means "one particular set of tasks." Job descriptions that lock people into performing tasks can inhibit speed and agility, both of which are critical in today's workplace. Employees are expected not only to do the job to which they are assigned, but also to "contribute." To contribute, design firm employees must maintain core competencies while learning something new based on high-quality standards, keeping clients happy, and keeping costs under control.

2. What designers considered to be a routine job a few years ago now has to be flexible in its tasks without the support of direct supervision. Some employees do not work well in this type of environment and must be supported in other ways.

3. Although until recently design firms have classed technological skills as "nice to have," now they find them to be imperative. Design firms of all sizes consider basic technology skills to be critical to the decision-making process. Firms can no longer afford to have employees who cannot communicate digitally.

Your firm should ask itself these key questions before making a move to recruit talent:

- *What are the most pressing competitive priorities facing your firm right now?*

- *Will hiring a person help your firm stay competitive?*

- *What are the key trends in the industry, and do your firm's overall business goals match these trends?*

MENTORING

The best way for a design firm to foster professional growth and ensure that its employees learn how the firm operates is to assign a mentor, sometimes called a sponsor. These are employees who act as a new hire's "big brother" or "big sister," sometimes for a period of time, but more likely until a certain professional threshold is reached. The role of a mentor can vary from just being available to answer questions and give support when necessary to having periodic meetings that provide goals and feedback to the employee. Mentors are different from supervisors in that they do not oversee the employee's day-to-day work performance.

The key to a successful mentoring program is to make an educated selection of mentors and prepare the mentors for their role. Here are four criteria that the design firm should use to ensure successful mentoring.

1. *Choose good role models.* Choose employees who possess a good attitude that you would like others to emulate. Mentors do not necessarily need to be your most senior managers, but they should be naturally empathetic and genuinely enjoy helping others.

2. *Get recommendations.* Ask project managers and others in your firm who they think would make a good mentor.

3. *Find common ground.* Finding similarities between the employee and the mentor, such as having attended the same design school or having similar design tastes, is key for good rapport.

4. *Provide training.* Provide expectations to mentors about what is required of them, the role they will be playing, and what they can expect in return (time commitment, extra time off, etc.).

If the mentor and employee are not getting along, it is best to introduce the employee to another mentor quickly. A postmentor interview with both the affected employee and the mentor should take place so that the source of the friction can be isolated and worked out.