

HALTON BUSINESSES FACE HIRING SQUEEZE

DIFFICULTIES CONTINUE FILLING MANY POSITIONS

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The following is the final instalment in a three-part series on the Halton job market, with this week's story focusing on the challenges facing local employers.

The pandemic burnout is causing some to weigh their career options more carefully.

In Halton Hills — and the region at large — this has contributed to "a fight" for talent.

"A lot of businesses are looking for employees, but finding the right fit for specialized and niche positions is a little more difficult than normal," said Lenae Dupuis, a human resource consultant with HR Made EZ.

Dupuis, whose consulting firm serves clients in Halton and across the GTA, said many people are "re-evaluating their work and life balance."

"Salary expectations are a bit higher right now. With the COVID (lock-

down) period, a lot of people were able to work remotely and, I think, they want to remain working remotely," she said, while noting it is dependent on the job sectors.

Scott McCammon, president and CEO of Milton Chamber of Commerce, has a similar take.

"Bottom line is, hiring is still a challenge," he said, which he put down to the region's low unemployment rate, people moving and switching careers, and those not re-entering the workforce as quickly. "The competition for staff is probably a lot higher than it's been in a few years."

As for the desire for flexible work arrangements, a recent labour market study by Peel Halton Workforce Development Group, which surveyed 700 employers across the GTA — including 62 in Oakville, 56 in Milton, 52 in Burlington, and 17 in Halton Hills — showed around one third of employers expect that employees will work from home 30 to 70 per cent of the time.

But McCammon said many of the open positions being recruited can't accommodate those, particu-

larly in the case of manufacturing, warehousing, trade work, transportation, and general labour.

Given the challenges, companies have to get creative in dealing with lower staffing levels and in the way they recruit, compensate and retain employees — with the retail and hospitality industry facing one of the biggest obstacles, he said.

"It's a tough category because of the roller-coaster of changes in terms of COVID protocols. One day they're open, the next day they're closed. So it makes it very difficult to retain staff when you can't promise that they've got a certain return-to-work date," he said.

To hire and retain workers, he said companies — in general — have to change the way they do things.

This includes increasing the pay scales or changing compensation, offering more benefits or bonuses, and retraining and up-skilling employees to create promotion opportunities to entice workers to stay.

When it comes to success stories, Uline is one organization able to surpass its hiring goal in 2021.



Graham Paine/Metroland

Lenae Dupuis, a consultant with HR Made EZ, has found more and more people are re-evaluating their career choices.

"I think we're going to embrace a new way of working."

– HR consultant Lenae Dupuis

Maureen Klotz, senior human resources manager with the shipping supply firm, said despite the competitive labour market, it grew its North American workforce by 16 per cent last year with 2,200 new employees — 128 of those in its north Halton warehouse.

"Our successes have really hinged on several important factors — dedicated marketing and regular hiring event efforts to reach a broader base of potential employees and con-

tinuing to offer industry-leading benefits," she said in an email.

In some industries, Dupuis, the business consultant, said she has seen companies moving to an unlimited paid time off policy that comes with greater responsibility autonomy.

"How you do your work is your prerogative, just as

long as you get your work done," she said.

With no foreseeable end in sight to the pandemic, Dupuis believes people will continue to take inventory of what works for them in their work environment.

"I think we're going to embrace a new way of working," she said.

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: With competition for talent continuing to heat up, we asked local business stakeholders on the state of the hiring market in Halton.



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