

## KANSAS CITY STAR BUSINESS COMMENTARY

# Guest column | Where do jobs comes from?

By LEIGH BRANHAM

Special to The Star



Leigh Branham is founder & CEO of Keeping the People Inc., a management consulting firm that helps organizations analyze the root causes of employee disengagement and turnover, and then address them. He is the author of three books on the subject of employee engagement and retention.

“Daddy, where do jobs come from?”

There are several answers to this question. Jobs are born when businesses are started and as they grow, and sometimes when government funds are allocated or when foundation grants are awarded.

In my 20-plus-year career coaching job seekers, I had a front-row seat to the free-market job-creation process. I always thought it sad that so many of the people I coached had never been told “the birds and the bees” about how jobs are created and that there was this thing called “the hidden job market” where 70 percent of jobs are found or created. Instead of heeding my advice to start uncovering the unpublished jobs, they would spend their days scanning want ads and online job sites. Too often, weeks would go by without a single meeting with potential employers.

Many would nod their heads as I explained the right way to network — by preparing a starter target list of companies, writing a 30-second introduction highlighting their strengths and skills (being careful to say you don't expect your contacts to have a job), and seeking advice, information, and referrals. Still, many were never comfortable with this approach and persisted in their exclusive pursuit of advertised vacancies.

Occasionally, they would get lucky and be invited to an interview and, more rarely, even find a job. But all too often, limiting their searches to the formal job market led to frustration and depression. One can take only so many rejections or so much being ignored until one begins to conclude "something's wrong with me," when really it's the way one is looking that's all wrong.

How different was the experience of job seekers who chose to reach out and connect with everyone they knew, asked for their help, and discovered for themselves how willing others were to lend an ear and a hand. As a result, many found themselves "in the right place at the right time."

Here's a common story they would tell: "I met with so-and-so with such-and-such company because my friend thought he might have some advice and ideas for me. Well, it turns out the manager I met with has a need for someone like me even though he didn't have an actual job opening. So, they made me a job offer on the spot." And so ... another job is born.

A very wise man — the late Sidney Fine, former director of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics — once said, "A job is a talent that meets a need." It's the best definition I've ever heard of what a job is. A job is not just a resumé that meets a job opening. It's a talent that meets a need. This is a very liberating definition because it broadens the playing field immensely.

Most companies are faced with one or more of the following: roadblocks, bottlenecks, chronic shortages, process weaknesses, missing pieces, underused resources, "impossible" situations, unexpected failures or successes, and challenges in different teams or units working together. Just imagine how many jobs could be created if employers' emerging needs could somehow be matched with the right talents.

Perhaps more companies should start taking formal inventory of emerging needs that, if filled with the right talent, would allow them to pursue new market opportunities and revenue. Most companies have disengaged employees with underused talents who would like nothing more than to be reassigned to take on a new challenge. By moving the underemployed person to a newly created job to meet an unmet need, a vacancy is created that must be filled, thus creating yet another job opportunity for someone else.

From what I read, many companies are "sitting on their cash" and not hiring because of the uncertain economic and political situation. Some have started hiring again, but many more are still waiting, which is unfortunate, especially with so much talent in the market and so many restless employees ready to jump ship as the economy improves. Certainly, funding for public policy initiatives, such as tax breaks for business that create jobs, are a piece of the solution.

Until politicians prove themselves able to address the job creation challenge, individual job seekers need to search smarter.

So, job seekers: Stop spending so much time sending resumés and searching on-line. Spend three-fourths of your time researching, networking face-to-face and through social media. Start asking prospective employers about their unmet needs, challenges and “headaches” that your talents may help relieve. Stop sending so many resumés and start making proposals based on filling the unmet needs you uncover. Even if you don’t create a full-time job for yourself, you may at least create a part-time or temporary job or project.

My advice to job seekers and hiring managers alike is — get creative! You, too, can be a job creator.

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