



# Ayers Report

WINTER 2004

*from The Ayers Group, Inc., a co-owner of Career Partners International*

## AYERS ESTABLISHES TRANSATLANTIC OPERATIONS WITH OFFICE IN LONDON

With the opening of an office in London in November, The Ayers Group makes its official entry into the global marketplace.

“This is where our growth is taking us,” Bill Ayers comments. “We now have a base in each of the world’s top two financial centers.”

The move came about largely in response to the needs of a major client. The Ayers Group has been working closely with a major London-based investment bank, successfully completing transatlantic searches for several top-level executives within the past few months.

“The client wanted us to have a local presence and is supporting us in our effort to establish one,” says Bob Deissig, Ayers President of Staffing Services. “They like the way we work—particularly the thoroughness with which we screen our candidates. Many of our other financial services clients have London-based operations, and their response to this initiative has been overwhelmingly positive.

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To learn more about our programs, please call:

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## PRESIDENT’S LETTER

### RE-TENSION IN THE GLOBAL RECOVERY

*There’s good news: the recovery  
is gathering steam.*

The economy is showing robust growth: 7.2% in the third quarter. The stock market is soaring. Profits are rising. M&A activity is picking up, along with corporate IT spending and investment. We’ve seen three straight months of job gains, with the latest being almost twice as large as expected and all in the service sector. The mood is lifting. And as you’ll see throughout this issue of the *Ayers Report*, the signs have begun to appear in our marketplace. Recruitment and IT consulting are up—here and abroad.

The Ayers Group, which began 2003 as a regional firm with five offices in the tri-state area, will enter 2004 as an international organization with a recruiting office in London. As we move into our 29th year of business, we’re looking ahead to our 30th anniversary with the feeling that for the first time in several years we’ll have something to celebrate.

Yes, there’s good news. But, as is usually the case, it’s tempered by bad news.

We’ve been warning for more than a year now that when the recovery kicks in, the floodgates are going to crash open. Employees who have survived the waves of downsizing and have been doing more with less—and for less—will flood out. All the line managers we talk

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**January 14** — “Re-Tension in the Global Recovery”  
breakfast seminar

**May 25** — Breakfast seminar on leadership featuring  
William Weldon, Chairman and CEO of Johnson & Johnson

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# KEEPING NETWORKING SKILLS HONED



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In a job market where networking accounts for more than 90 percent of all successful landings, it is critical for job seekers to keep their networking skills sharp. But with searches extending over prolonged time periods, maintaining an edge can be tough. The *Ayers Report* asked Terry Ebert, Managing Director of Career Transition Services, about a few of the most common networking pitfalls he has observed and how to avoid them.

## NETWORKING PITFALL #1: *Losing sight of the basics*

“Many people forget that networking is *not* about asking for a job. Taking that tack carries the risk of putting the contact off. The objective of networking is to gather information and insights with regard to a company or industry. As contacts talk about ‘top-of-mind’ issues in their companies, look for ways to add value by drawing on your own experience. ‘We had a similar situation at X and found that by doing...’ This approach establishes a quid pro quo, gives the contact a better sense of what you bring to the table, and positions the exchange as a conversation between equals rather than manager and supplicant.”

## NETWORKING PITFALL #2: *Over-networked targets*

“If they don’t hear back after the first or second attempt to reach the contact, some candidates get frustrated and stop trying. You don’t have the luxury of giving up so quickly. It may take a third or even fourth phone call or fax. Gentle persistence frequently pays off.”

## NETWORKING PITFALL #3: *Group grouching sessions*

“There is an increasing dependence on networking groups. If you’re just meeting with others who are out of work and understandably anxious and frustrated, it doesn’t take much for the gathering to become a gripe session. Then it picks up momentum and heads into an uncontrollable downward spiral, which doesn’t help anyone. To be truly effective, networking should be structured. I recommend facilitated groups, such as our Peak Performance Teams, the HR Networking Groups we host in each office, or outside structured/facilitated networking groups such as the Executive Forum and MENG.”

## NETWORKING PITFALL #4: *False pride*

“Networking should appropriately focus on people who are in jobs or organizations appropriate to your target list, but you also need to broaden your horizons. Many candidates are reluctant to network among friends; relatives; neighbors; clergy; members of their religious congregations, clubs, or associations; and other

potentially useful sources. I view this as false pride because it’s counterproductive.

“You never know where you’re going to find a lead. I recently contacted a fellow patient who was networked to me by my dentist, and Ayers ultimately helped the person find a position. I know of a job seeker who made contact with an executive at a target company through the bartender at a country club.

“Associations of all kinds—professional, alumni, special-interest, etc.—are a great source of contacts. Bill Ayers likes to invoke the concept of the ‘granfalloon’ from Kurt Vonnegut’s *Cat’s Cradle*. It’s the idea of having some loose affiliation—graduating from the same college, sharing a cultural heritage or interest in the same hobby, etc.—that enables people to connect to one another. This is a way to exponentially increase the size of your network.” ■



## MANAGING ACROSS GENERATIONS WORKSHOP

Concerned about the conflict between Veteran and Baby Boomer employees on one hand and Generation-X and -Y employees on the other, a law firm came to Ayers for assistance in addressing the issues. The result is a new program for individuals charged with cross-generational management.

Developed and conducted by Senior Consultant Carol Ann Caccioppoli—former director of training for a major financial services firm—the half-day workshop features a variety of interactive formats. It involves managers in small-group discussions about handling issues raised by a multigenerational workplace where comfort levels with technology and older employees reporting to younger ones are potentially divisive factors. The program is designed to help participants

- understand the factors that shape how each generation views its role in the workplace and the expectations its members bring to their jobs
- address misperceptions about different generations
- assess their own behaviors, skills, values, and needs
- communicate more effectively across age groups
- identify and cultivate “stars” from all generations

For more information, contact Joan Caruso, Managing Director of Organizational Effectiveness Consulting, at 212.889.7788 or [joan.caruso@ayers.com](mailto:joan.caruso@ayers.com). ■

# The Value of Participating in Peak Performance Teams

Since the last issue of the *Ayers Report*, four new Peak Performance Teams (PPTs) have been formed and completed a cycle. Nearly half the 36 participating candidates landed during or shortly after the eight-to-ten-week program. In addition, 75 percent of those participating in the original, ongoing CEO-level team have landed in recent months. A new set of teams is now meeting.

## THE FACILITATOR'S VIEW

We asked the Ayers consultants who serve as team facilitators to talk about the value of structured networking.

“Peak Performance Teams take people beyond the traditional outplacement box,” says Dr. Peter Olsinski. “It’s about getting attitudinally and psychologically focused. Participation helps job seekers recognize that others are going through the same experience and the value of interacting with those people.”

“Job search is a lonely, intensely psychological process, and people who pursue it in isolation are at a disadvantage,” Damon Montal observes. “The teams provide members with emotional support and competition in a positive sense. Seeing one person’s success motivates and stimulates the others.”

“The team structure fosters an exchange of advice and feedback,” adds Doug O’Connor. “The intelligence and strategies participants pick up can save months of trying to figure out on their own what works and what doesn’t.”

“People don’t usually grow and change unless they’re challenged, which is difficult when they’re no longer working,” says Donna Schwarz. “The team takes the place of the work environment, providing stimulation and a set of deliverables. It helps participants stay fresh and flexible by encouraging new behaviors and a change of attitude.”

“There’s a lot of peer interaction, pressure, and responsibility,” says Bill Clark. “Participants promise things to the group in terms of progress and plans and feel obligated to deliver.”

The facilitator’s role requires a deft touch. “The challenge is to give the group just enough attention to keep it on track yet leave everyone with the feeling of ownership, satisfaction, and accomplishment,” Bill Clark observes. “Our job is to create an environment conducive to emotional enrichment and mutual supportiveness while fostering individual accountability and productive use of time in the job search,” adds Dr. Olsinski.

It’s a job that entails understanding the group dynamic; encouraging interaction and full participation; eliciting reactions, solutions, and suggestions; and regulating the advice and information participants exchange. At the same time, the facilitator tactfully prevents counterproductive discussion. “We

## WHAT ARE PEAK PERFORMANCE TEAMS?

*PPTs are structured networking groups that provide members with mutual job-search support, including project-management support, market intelligence, leads, contacts, advice, and encouragement. Each team comprises comparable-level executives—from manager to CEO—in different disciplines. Ayers candidates who meet certain qualifications and commit to attending weekly meetings, setting goals and targets, and reporting on progress are eligible to participate. The teams, which meet in the firm’s offices, are self-directed but facilitated by an Ayers consultant.*

don’t talk too much about emotions and feelings,” says Damon Montal. “It’s more about strategies, actions, and overcoming challenges.”

As Donna Schwarz summarizes, “The skill of the facilitator is in turning a group of strangers into a cohesive team that’s willing to share information and work for each other.”

## THE PARTICIPANT'S PERSPECTIVE

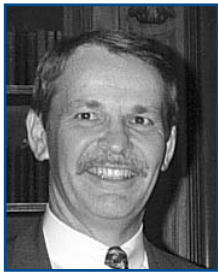
According to one recent PPT graduate, participating “provided a level of discipline beyond what I was doing on my own and perspectives I wouldn’t otherwise have had. It gave me other people’s impressions and opinions regarding the best way to proceed at different junctions of my search process.

“As we reported on our weekly progress, the facilitator would call us to task in a supportive way and give advice on how to structure our searches and improve our interviewing techniques and presentation. Our facilitator made most of us better. Networking wasn’t something most of us were used to doing. And we weren’t prepared for the dynamic of the current market. The facilitator taught us the ‘religion’ of networking. Being on the team demystified networking by demonstrating it and its value on a small scale, which has made me more comfortable doing it in a larger arena.

“Individuals who were more reserved became motivated to expand themselves. I know I developed. It motivated me to try harder and to be hopeful. Certainly, the individuals who got jobs provided a lift for the rest of us.”

On the subject of lead and contact sharing, he observed that members of his group were forthcoming. Since the PPT ended, he has continued to pass on resumés and network on behalf of other team members. ■

*Names of candidates are not disclosed in the Ayers Report to respect their privacy. To arrange to speak with a PPT participant, please contact Doug O’Connor at [doug.oconnor@ayers.com](mailto:doug.oconnor@ayers.com).*



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# STAFFING/IT CONSULTING— THE COMEBACK CONTINUES

The hiring market has picked up dramatically, according to the President of Staffing Services at The Ayers Group. “The mood is optimistic,” says Bob Deissig. “Many major financial services companies are beginning to open up. Our existing clients are becoming more active, and we continue to pick up new ones. Clients are moving projects from 2004 into 2003. They’re hiring at the junior and intermediate as well as senior levels. And for the first time in a long time, they’re being allowed to replace employees who leave—all encouraging signs.”

The Ayers executive notes that a number of the firm’s retained searches are coming to a successful conclusion. A search conducted by Managing Director Harry Plastik has resulted in the hiring of a CIO and Global Head of Fixed Income Technology for the American operations of a global investment bank. The candidate will be the creative force behind global technology solutions and platforms.

The firm also is working on filling requirements for senior-level security and risk-management people and recently filled a business-continuity/disaster-recovery-management position for a major insurance company.

## CONSULTING COMES BACK FIRST



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Third-quarter 2003 showed an upward trend for Ayers’ IT Consulting Practice as well—a trend that has continued into the current quarter and is expected to carry over into 2004.

“Typically when the market recovers, consulting comes back first,” practice head Donna Held observes. “Companies are short-staffed, and last quarter they began hiring consultants

to fill in the gaps. Now clients are telling us they need to ramp up but are uncertain what their head counts will be. Beginning in the first quarter, when they receive their budgets, they expect to do a lot of staff supplementation with the intent of exercising the right to hire during the course of the year. Until they know for certain about head count, this is how they intend to proceed.”

The Managing Director notes that demand for consultants continues to be heaviest on the infrastructure side. Among the positions the firm has been filling are requirements for Database Administrators, Architects, Project Managers, and Graphic Designers.

There may be another factor in this fourth-quarter increase, according to Bob Deissig. “When times were better, it was almost automatic for an employer making a key year-end hire to match the bonus the new employee was leaving behind. Even though things are loosening up, most companies won’t offer signing incentives and most employees won’t walk away from bonuses to take new positions. Hiring consultants to meet specific needs is the obvious alternative.”

## A SHOW OF FAITH

The head of Ayers’ recruiting office in Rye has observed a related trend. “As year-end approaches, more and more financial institutions of all sizes are committing to 2004 hires now but leaving the candidates in place to receive bonuses from their current employers,” says Managing Director Bill Kirk. “It’s a show of faith on both sides that enables candidates to get their well-earned bonuses and employers to get the people they want.

“This scenario means candidates are going to their new companies with a ‘clean slate’ financially—often for a better opportunity with a higher likelihood of longevity and security. They’re more conscious of the chance of a potentially risky marketplace because they’ve lived through it. Of course, there is the risk that current employers will make counter offers, but that’s something a hiring organization always faces.” ■

*“The mood is optimistic.”*



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# STAFF ANNOUNCEMENTS

We are pleased to announce that three senior members of the Ayers Recruiting Division have been promoted to Managing Director.

- Bill Kirk has been managing Ayers' recruiting office in Rye since it opened in October 2002 and is spearheading the firm's entry into new geographic markets, including Westchester and Connecticut, and industries, such as hedge funds. A nine-year Ayers veteran, he also has expanded his responsibilities in account management and recruiting to the global arena.
- Harry Plastik, who has been with Ayers for more than five years, has management responsibilities within the New York practice. He has been instrumental in the firm's recent expansion into the London market, including the hiring of staff members who report to him.
- Donna Held joined Ayers three years ago and has been instrumental in building the firm's IT Consulting Practice, which will soon enter its fourth year. As Sales Manager, she is leading the practice's expansion into industries beyond financial services (consumer products, insurance, transportation, publishing, information security, and risk mitigation) as well as new geographic markets.

Joining Ayers as Vice President of Client Relations is John Skabo, who oversees and serves as client liaison with corporate accounts and is actively involved in new-business development. John has more than 20 years experience in career management, including significant achievements in organizational planning and development, compensation, employee relations, and staffing. He was previously an executive con-

sultant at a global career-management services company, where he directed major downsizing projects and provided counseling to all management levels. John has held key HR positions with Fortune 500 firms—including HR Director at a division of Ciba-Geigy—and was a founding principal of a New York City-based career-management consulting firm that specialized in counseling senior executives.

We are also pleased to welcome three additional staff members who recently joined the firm as Senior Recruiters.

- Dan Collier brings to his new position the insights of a well-traveled professional whose background includes four years in IT recruiting and several years of sales/marketing experience in telecommunications and e-commerce. Dan, who has worked in the UK, Africa, and Australasia, has also served as Director of Strategy and Sales for a Talent-Relationship Management software startup.
- Farida Gibbs is an experienced professional who has delivered recruitment services in the IT, telecommunications, and teleservices industries in the UK for more than seven years. Her clients have included Hutchison 3G, Level 3, Worldcomm/MCI, Vitria Technology, NetIQ, and Inet Technologies. Farida is a member of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD).
- Roy Katz comes to Ayers with more than eight years experience in technology staffing and recruiting. He began his career on Wall Street as an investment advisor at a major financial services firm and now specializes in IT-executive recruiting for the financial services industry.

## OFFICE IN LONDON

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"We keep hearing that the London market lacks recruiting firms with the specialized experience and expertise in 'Wall Street IT' recruiting we bring to the table," Bob continues.

"London is really revving up," adds Managing Director Harry Plastik, who will oversee the London staff from Ayers' headquarters in New York. "In terms of front-office services in the financial industry, it's becoming a 50-50 split between New York and London."

The firm has chosen to establish its new office in the City, long the traditional financial heart of London, on Lombard Street. Reborn in the twentieth century as a global financial

center, the City is home to Europe's largest stock market, is the world's leading foreign market, and serves as international headquarters for financial institutions and law firms from around the globe. Lombard Street, named for the Italian and Lombard merchants and bankers who settled there in the thirteenth century, has become synonymous with City banking.

Following is the address for the new office:

The Ayers Group, Ltd.  
68 Lombard Street  
London, EC3V 9LJ, United Kingdom



## SUCCESSFUL LANDINGS

An increasing number of job seekers—recognizing the permanent exit of jobs from their industries/fields, looking for a change from the corporate environment, or seeking more control over their lives—are becoming entrepreneurs. To address this growing trend, Ayers' New York office is sponsoring programs conducted by Keld Alstrup of the Franchise Network (FranNet), a franchise-consulting group. Seminars enable candidates to explore investment choices in the automotive, B2B, educational, food service, retail, and personal services fields. One-on-one sessions help candidates assess their personalities, skills, goals, and objectives in terms of finding a suitable investment match. Following are several success stories.

- A 20-year-veteran of the publishing industry, tired of corporate life and unable to land a position he could be happy with, decided to switch gears. After exploring a variety of franchising options, he and his wife purchased an automotive-service franchise in the New York City area.
- At the recommendation of an Ayers consultant, FranNet met with a former insurance industry executive and his wife for assessment. After a period of comprehensive due diligence, the couple are preparing to open a children's-tutoring business.

- A young candidate who had gained extensive experience in sales and business operations while traveling the world for a corporate employer was looking to spend more time with his family and return to his native Canada. He is now a business coach and mentor to small and medium-sized businesses in British Columbia.

In addition, candidates continue to network and reinvent their way into satisfying new positions, as in the following cases.

- A mid-level business analyst from the global equities division of a major bank researched the market to determine current need and used her legal education to reposition herself in the field of compliance. She landed a position as an investment compliance analyst for a mid-size financial services firm—and a 17.5 percent raise.
- A junior financial analyst whose department was eliminated networked among the alumni of her college to gain an interview with a major investment bank. The result: a position as an equity research analyst with a pay increase of 44.5 percent. ■

*Names of candidates are not disclosed in the Ayers Report to respect their privacy. To arrange to speak with any of them regarding their job-search experiences, please contact Doug O'Connor at [doug.oconnor@ayers.com](mailto:doug.oconnor@ayers.com).*

## AYERS AND CPI INTRODUCE CAREERADVANTAGE ONLINE RESOURCE

CareerAdvantage—the CPI Career Business and Intelligence Portal developed by Career Partners International and TrueAdvantage—is now available to candidates in Ayers out-placement programs.

A unique, comprehensive online resource, CareerAdvantage is a database that incorporates real-time information and job-search management tools. Among the features it offers are

- **Company/Executive/Recruiter Intelligence**—provides up-to-date information on more than 1.5 million businesses and over 10,000 recruiting firms in the U.S. and Canada, as well as corporate executives and entrepreneurs
- **Job Bank**—aggregates information about open positions from job boards and company Web sites
- **IntelliWatch**—automatically tracks the latest news on user-specified companies
- **Contact Manager**—enables users to record and manage information, contacts, schedules, notes, etc., online

“CareerAdvantage is a personalized database,” observes David Lockwood, Ayers' Director of Research and Internet

Technology. “Users determine and refine the information they receive by establishing parameters and selecting preferences, categories, and subcategories. One real advantage it offers over the Career Search database we previously offered, as well as other subscription databases such as D&B, is the Hiring Intelligence feature.”

Hiring Intelligence enables users to specify companies they're interested in and then provides real-time reports about mergers and acquisitions, business deals, management changes, relocations, or other developments that might trigger employment opportunities at those companies. “It's a terrific tool,” David says and adds that TrueAdvantage is working with CPI to continuously improve CareerAdvantage.

The new online resource is accessed through the Internet Resource Center (IRC) on the Ayers Web site under Resource Links/Ayers Subscription Databases. As with all Ayers online resources, candidates can tap into CareerAdvantage from anywhere in the world at any time. One-hour online training sessions are offered weekly in each Ayers office. For more information, contact [david.lockwood@ayers.com](mailto:david.lockwood@ayers.com). ■

# AYERS PROFESSIONALS SHARE EXPERTISE

As part of The Ayers Group's commitment to the community at large, the firm's professionals share their knowledge and expertise with students, job seekers, client constituencies, and others through a variety of forums. Following are several recent examples.

- Joan Caruso, Managing Director of OEC, brought members of HR Networking Groups hosted by Ayer's New York and Norwalk offices up to date on the latest issues and trends in organizational development.
- Terry Ebert, Managing Director of Career Transition Services, has been asked to speak to student groups at both Boston University and MIT as a result of contacts made at Ayers' College Day program held last June. He will be working with the students in preparation for their job searches, addressing topics that include resumé development, networking, and interviewing.
- Vice President Tom Klugewicz presented a two-hour seminar on how to develop a self-marketing plan to members of Job Seekers of Princeton. Founded in 1982, Job Seekers is an instruction and support group for those who are unemployed or changing careers.
- Ellen Perlstein, VP-Business Development, created a seminar on "Networking: Strategies for Continuous Career Growth" targeted to the needs of HR professionals. She has presented it to Accenture HR staff community meetings in New Jersey and New York and also to the HR Networking Group hosted by Ayers in New York.
- Associate Donna Schwarz presented effective-interviewing seminars at the New York Women in Communications Career Conference and a weekend workshop that is part of the certificate program in adult career planning and development at NYU's School of Continuing & Professional Studies. She co-presented a seminar on "English for Finding a Job" to an international student group.
- Attendees at several meetings of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church's Employment Advisory Committee learned about "Bridging the Employment Gap With Temporary Work" from Senior Consultant Dan Shea. The monthly meetings, which cover various aspects of job search, are held at the church's parish house in Manhattan and are open to the public. ■

## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

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with know it's coming, and they're afraid they'll lose good people if you—the HR professionals—don't do something to stem the tide. (See article on page 8)

The problem is that downsizing has left you raw. You not only had to make the cuts, you then had to endure the devastation of your own ranks. As requirements for HR positions begin to materialize, we find that many of those we're dealing with in that area are contemplating jumping ship. Stop and think about it. The fact that you and your peers feel this way is all the verification you need that everyone else does, too.

While we understand how you're feeling, we also know that the best way to help is by issuing a wake-up call. There is going to be a game of musical chairs on a grand scale. That's a recruiting firm's dream but an HR nightmare.

This global recovery is going to be about

- **Re-tension**—finding ways to deal with the stress and strain resulting from the uncertainty that will flow with the recovery and to bring things into a new balance
- **Retention**—having a plan in place for identifying and retaining good employees

On January 14, The Ayers Group will hold a breakfast seminar designed to provide perspective on what lies ahead in the coming year and how you can prepare your organization for dealing with re-tension/retention. We'll look at economic trends and their implications for business, positioning for recovery, and best practices for recruitment and retention. Our panelists will be

- Dennis Callahan, Executive Vice President and CIO of The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America
- Kathleen Camilli, the US Economist at Credit Suisse Asset Management in New York
- Michael Carey, Vice President and global head of HR at Johnson & Johnson

Another issue that has become more crucial than ever in the new era of governance reform and corporate transparency brought on by recent corporate scandals is leadership. The Ayers Group is launching a series of breakfast programs in New York featuring leaders from a variety of fields who will talk about their lives and careers, sharing insights about what constitutes a good leader. This series will kick off on May 25 with William Weldon, Chairman and CEO of Johnson & Johnson.

You will be hearing more from us in the weeks ahead regarding these new programs. In the meantime, we hope you and your team have begun to position, prepare, and plan. ■



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# A RETENTION STRATEGY— YOUR BEST DEFENSE IN THE COMING WAR FOR TALENT

Although I'm looking forward to the coming turnaround as much as anyone, I'm concerned that many companies may not be prepared for the talent war that almost certainly will ensue. Employees have stayed

in place because they've had few, if any, alternatives. Far from being happy, they've been demoralized by downsizings, worn out by carrying extra workloads, stifled by the lack of advancement opportunities, disappointed by slim or nonexistent salary increases, and frustrated by bonuses that failed to materialize when performance goals were achieved. No one should be surprised when the mass exodus begins.

It's been long enough since the last talent war and the intervening period has been so tumultuous that many organizations have lost sight of the importance of managing retention. For the past 18 months, we have been urging clients to refocus and put retention strategies in place because once the revolving door is in motion it will be too late.

Our white paper, "Retaining Valued Employees" (available at [www.ayers.com](http://www.ayers.com)), puts retention in perspective, examining why employees leave or stay, exploring the roles of the organization and the manager, and laying out strategies, tools, and best practices. As its findings indicate, "Your best defense against poaching is an ongoing retention plan."

## MANAGERS ARE THE KEY

The case for having a retention program in place is compelling. Turnover is expensive and the full cost is rarely taken into account. An unplanned defection can cost up to four times the departing employee's salary when you factor in the cost of recruiting and bringing a replacement up to speed—not to mention intangibles such as lost productivity, quality, contacts, institutional knowledge, etc.

According to our research, an employee's relationship with his/her boss is the single most critical factor affecting retention. Too many managers mistakenly believe that money, benefits, and perks—issues beyond their control—are the retention hot buttons. In fact, for most employees, and especially younger ones, expectations go well beyond money to things such as jobs that are exciting, engaging, and allow them to make a valued contribution to a mission they buy into. Companies whose managers understand that

and who are in touch with their employees will be the most successful at holding onto valued human resources in the months ahead.

The manager's top tool for retention is being able to answer one question: What keeps my employees here? If you are an effective manager, you know what is important to each of your reports and what he/she likes about working with you and for the company. You accept responsibility for managing to these issues—which do lie within your control—to help retain star employees. This is not the latest management fad or a kind of manipulation, but the foundation of a positive, proactive management style.

## SINGLE OUT THE STARS

Right now, your chief objective should be to single out your best, most desirable, and hardest-to-replace employees and make plans for keeping them. At the same time, start thinking about replacement strategies because, despite your best efforts, you aren't likely to keep them all.

Which brings me to the point that an effective retention program begins with the hiring process. Job descriptions, recruitment, selection, and orientation are the program's foundations. You also need to consider

- What about your firm should be attractive to potential employees
- What story about your firm people should come away from the recruiting process with, even if you don't hire them
- What you can do to ensure that expectations raised during recruiting will be fulfilled as you and your new hires work and grow together

Ultimately, retention is the result of good, employee-centered management practices that permeate the organization. It may be late to get started, but better late than never. ■

To keep a finger on the pulse of its constituencies, The Ayers Group conducts an online survey in each issue of the *Ayers Report* e-newsletter. To participate in the current poll or view results from previous polls, visit [www.ayers.com](http://www.ayers.com).