Wanted: Talent

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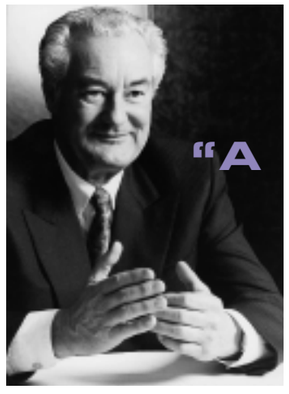
The global battle for skilled personnel has intensified at a much more surprising pace and with greater ferocity than ever anticipated. Human capital is fast becoming the factor limiting the boom in the New Economy. It is the race to find IT experts that is currently hitting the headlines, but a global tug-of-war has already commenced to unearth talent in other future-oriented sectors. The internationalization that has already been a way of life for movie stars, world-class athletes and top managers for years is now encroaching upon the world of skilled labor. However, the sheer might with which globalization is impacting the employment market is totally new.

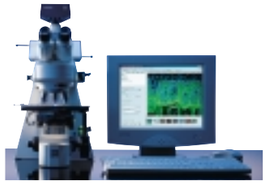


"A global tug-of-war for talent has already commenced."

Things do not look too hot for Germany in the fight for highly qualified manpower. The up-and-coming generation of specialists is emigrating – primarily to the USA to make use of the better career opportunities offered there. Moreover, foreign students are coming less and less frequently to Germany, as they see more possibilities in other countries. Therefore, the "Green Card" initiative launched by the German government to attract talented people from the IT sector is a move in the right direction. We must take two factors into account. First, real specialists will not simply come of their own accord, but must be actively recruited. Second, the acute lack of IT specialists is only a warning signal indicating a growing dilemma in Germany's educational system. There is an increasing disparity between the long-term education of colleges and universities and the short-term requirements of industry. In the 52nd year of its existence the Fraunhofer Society has risen to this challenge and is developing new methods for effective, qualified training and education in order to adapt the talent potential available to the demands of industry. Within the German research landscape, the Fraunhofer Society has a unique characteristic: its clear market orientation. This also applies to up-and-coming young scientists.

The much longed-for economic upturn in Germany has barely arrived and already the required experts are not available on the job market despite high unemployment. A closer look at supply and demand quickly unravels this seeming contradiction. The oversupply on the one hand and the shortage on the other are attributable to mistakes made in the past. Therefore, we should ensure that the mistakes of the future for which we are currently laying the foundations are not as serious. A shortage of specialists is a long-term trend: compared to other industrial nations, Germany has one third fewer engineers and IT specialists. These alarming figures were given in the new report published by the OECD in mid-March. In the 29 OECD states, there is an average of 1,500 engineers or scientists to every 100,000 employees. With a figure of only 1,040, Germany falls short of this figure by far. Top of the list were Finland, France, Ireland, Japan and Korea with 5,200 to 2,200 specialists per 100,000 employees. To sum up, the OECD study reveals that Germany has not gotten any worse, but that others have gotten better. In the past 20 years, for instance, the number of university students has soared, except in Germany. While 40 % of an age group commenced third-level education on average in the OECD states in 1998, it was a mere 28 % in Germany. This drop to below average is even more dramatic for a country whose only raw material is knowledge, and knowledge is a commodity that must be constantly renewed by well-educated people.

In the current, far-reaching structural changes taking place in the economy and the turbulent transformations occurring in the markets, surprising opportunities are emerging for individuals. The increasing number of new companies testifies to the fact that success is possible if creativity and the willingness to take risks are combined. A new "zeitgeist" is already pushing its way to the foreground: a world of pioneering enterprise. Considerable momentum could be generated by creative researchers if only they had the opportunity to set up their own firm. Specialists will be prepared to stay in their own country if they can develop their talent. With a special venture group, the Fraunhofer Society has now begun to organize and look after the new firms being founded around its institutes more intensively. Our aim is to expand the diversity of networking and interweaving possibilities with industry, whether through spinoffs, special workgroups at the institute or in a firm, joint research units or close cooperation projects. Our experience has shown that the most effective technology transfer is the transfer of brains. This is precisely why we should prevent a sellout of talent at all costs.



Impressum

Innovation
The Magazine from Carl Zeiss
No. 9, April 2001

"Innovation" appears at irregular intervals in German and English. It was formerly called "Zeiss Information with Jena Review" (1992 to 1996), previously "Zeiss Information" (1953 to 1991) and "Jena Review" (1956 to 1991).The issues of the magazine will be serially numbered, regardless of the year in question, beginning with No. 1/1996.

Publisher: Carl Zeiss, Oberkochen, Corporate Communications, Lothar Janiak.
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Layout: Marketingkommunikation Carl Zeiss, Oberkochen, Germany. MSW Aalen, Germany.
Setting: Typografie Werkstatt Hermann, D-73114 Schlat, Germany.
Printed in Germany by C. Maurer, Druck und Verlag, D-73312 Geislingen a. d. Steige, Germany.

ISSN 1431-8059

If readers have any inquiries about how the magazine can be obtained or if they wish to change their address (the customer number should be indicated, if applicable), we would kindly ask them to contact the editor.

Picture sources: Unless otherwise specified, all photographs were contributed by the authors or originate in the archives of Carl Zeiss.

Authors: If no information is given to the contrary, the authors of the articles are employees of Carl Zeiss and can be contacted via the editor.

Cover photo:
Mammoth Hot Springs in Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming, USA.
Warm water nourished the bacteria and algae, coloring the white sinter crust yellow brown and green. It is heated in the volcanic subsoil, dissolving chalk from the stone and carrying it to the earth's surface. As soon as the water comes into contact with the cold air, the chalk is precipitated and deposited in step-like formations.
(Please also see the article: What Color is the Earth? pages 4 to 9).

Outside back cover:
Carl Zeiss produced an optical discovery set devised by the conceptual artist *Lawrence Weiner* as an exhibition edition for his interior installation of writing and symbols in the Deutsche Guggenheim Berlin Gallery.
(Please also see the article: NACH ALLES / AFTER ALL, pages 14 and 15).