

Freedom from fear in 2009

By Philip Carrigan

Excellent opportunities abound at foreign pharma companies here in Japan, as Reed Maurer rightly pointed out in a recent edition of Pharma Japan.

I agree wholeheartedly, and believe next year will continue to be a time of golden opportunities for top talent in the pharma industry.

This year we have been asked to fill some 250 positions and have only been able to place 30% of these jobs. Either we are not very good at our work, or the demand for top talent is outstripping supply. We believe it is the latter.

We have had more than 500 face-to-face meetings with new candidates and have hardly made a dent in the number of top positions available in our booming industry. Marketing and project managers, CMC and of course Regulatory Affairs experts are positions all in high demand.

It has been “all systems go” in the pharmaceutical industry in 2008, and there has been an especially strong demand for bilingual talent. In fact, the Pharma team at Optia Partners has had its most successful year ever increasing by 30%.

However, changing jobs can be stressful for some people. Changing companies, informing colleagues, friends and family that you are moving to greener pastures can be both exciting but also frightening.

Recently, our newspapers are filled with doom and gloom as the financial markets tumble. Looking at the Nikkei or our stock portfolios can also turn our blood cold. It's easy to be fearful of the future and the unknown. However, uncertainty is the breeding ground of inaction.

According to Donald R. Keough (former Coca-Cola CEO) in his highly entertaining book, ‘The Ten Commandments for Business Failure’, if you want to fail you need to be fearful of the future.

I enjoy recalling one acronym for the word fear: False Evidence Appearing Real.

The truth is that most of our worries are unfounded and do not come to pass. But fear can be crippling. The fear of change and the fear we are going to make the wrong decision can be so overwhelming that we do not take the necessary action.

Even if the action may be beneficial in the long term we sometimes freeze. We fear losing something we have, and we fear of not getting what we want. We are gripped by the fear of uncertainty. The “what-if?” phrase plays over and over again in our minds.

One thing for sure is that our lives and everything else, including big pharma companies are always changing. There are no guarantees at Takeda any more than there are at GSK.

However the reality is that demand for talent is booming as the foreign companies further expand their deep pipelines.

As we enter 2009, there has never been a more exciting time in the Pharma industry.