
OPINION

Global Thinkers Wanted in a World of Change

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A president of a European-based Japanese start-up recently explained that 2006 was one of the toughest years of his life. He found the challenges of Japan overwhelming because his staff was resistant to change. Every time he wanted to introduce a new idea or use global best practice, his staffers would retort: “No, that is not possible in Japan”.

Then he pondered about senior recruitment. “Considering the vast numbers of mergers - Mitsubishi Pharma and Tanabe Seiyaku; Roche and Chugai, and Fujisawa and Yamanouchi - shouldn't there be a wealth of talent in the market?” he asked himself.

Of course there were talented candidates who had taken early redundancy, however, many were not the globally focused candidates he was seeking. Ideally, the president wanted someone from his own European HQ who could speak Japanese. He wanted a creative, confident, forward thinking, proactive candidate who had an “it-can-be-done-in-Japan” attitude.

Should the EU client change his expectations? Or should Japanese companies be trying to develop global leaders?

Whether or not this candidate even exists, the fact remains that opportunities abound for candidates who have ‘global skills’. As Japanese Pharma companies look overseas to expand their markets and as foreign companies continue to grow in Japan, candidates who have developed a ‘global mind set’ will have far greater career choices.

Language and leadership abilities are two different skills and should not be confused. Fluency in English in itself is simply not enough but a multi-lingual ability needs to be developed in a global-minded player. The most respected companies have had policies to develop the candidates English and leadership skills.

Pfizer's in-house trainer Rob Schrull reported that his company had a clear set of guidelines regarding this issue. “Pharmacia had a policy that if an English speaking person (non-Japanese) was in the room, for any meeting or matter, it was required that English be spoken”. The market recognizes Pharmacia for having superior leadership programs and former Pharmacia staff are in high demand.

What can candidates do to increase their potential in the market and what can the company do to foster these global skills?

The development of English skills is paramount because it is the international language of business and the medium of communication for many international Pharma companies. At the same time, companies should invest in educational programs, such as MBAs or other related areas of study, which will build expertise.

New information leads to new thought patterns, which will lead to new behavior and like any investment, companies need to be patient and allow time to work its magic.

Companies need to create environments in which people, who are leaders in their field, can mingle with like-minded associates. Birds of a feather do indeed flock together.

Then companies need to set a definite time line of goals. Set targets when a certain skill or qualification will be attained or when an accomplishment will be completed.

How to developing global skills

- Use and develop your English skills
- Invest in yourself or the employee
- Associate with leaders
- Set specific goals, which have deadline.