

Business Leaders Reach Out To 'Returning' Talent.

Clarendon Executive is once again preparing a Christmas campaign aimed at attracting the ex-patriot executive community back to Northern Ireland. Karl Webb looks to how Northern Ireland's growing population of 'Returners' can offer our economy an added injection of talent at a critical time in our economic development.



It is difficult to remember the buoyancy that flowed so fluently in the early parts of 2008 as we continue to be immersed in a media fuelled wave of economic doom towards the end of the year. An overwhelming majority of organisations across all industries in Northern Ireland have been affected in some way by the global economic crisis and regrettably some have found themselves as being more vulnerable than others. However, with all the doom and gloom there is a growing impetus from our local business leaders to take stock, start to plan again for the future and pave the way for an economic recovery.

Some organisations will, of course, weather the economic storm better than others. While many businesses will react with dramatic cost cutting initiatives, primarily around the areas that are proven to create long term value, such as R&D, people development and marketing, there will be a number of organisations who buck the trend through a more innovative approach in all of these areas. Business survival will be at the top of the agenda for many of us through this economically challenging period and this can result on there being a greater reliance on our Boards and senior management teams to provide confidence and direction through innovation and effective leadership. In fact, many business

correspondents have commented that it is during these challenging times that true leaders emerge. Tough decisions must be made and some of these decisions will invariably impact the structure of the senior management team. Organisations must ensure that they have the right complement of skills in place to successfully steer the business through the turbulence and be well positioned to maximise the growth opportunities that emerge when the business climate improves.

The stability of the political situation and ongoing development of Northern Ireland's infrastructure has helped to make Northern Ireland a more attractive proposition for 'returners'.

During a recent 'Executive Perspectives' event, led by the Chief Executives Club at Queens in partnership with Clarendon Executive, an overwhelming majority of Northern Ireland businesses surveyed reported that the biggest challenge for local businesses in terms of attracting and retaining world class skills and talent still lies in the recruitment of senior management. It is inevitable that restructuring, right-sizing and redundancy campaigns will result in some casualties at senior management level in the local economy and this presents organisations with a pool of talented individuals who are actively

seeking new opportunities. However our experience has shown that during these tough times, senior managers are generally less inclined to consider a move unless their position is seriously under threat. With an ongoing element of uncertainty in the market, people are more inclined to sit tight. The competition for talent in the local market therefore is still fiercely competitive and many organisations are focusing some of their attention on an increasingly accessible talent pool in the ex-pat community.

Moving towards the third year of running our Christmas campaign at Belfast International and George Best Belfast City Airport, Clarendon Executive has had great success in attracting senior level executives back to Northern Ireland. The stability of the political situation and ongoing development of Northern Ireland's infrastructure has helped to make Northern Ireland a more attractive proposition for 'returners'. We have seen, at first hand, the increased level of interest from ex-pats in returning home. Building on the success of these

Christmas campaigns, coupled with our investment in technology and focus on engaging with the ex-pat community, we have been able to introduce world class talent to Northern Ireland businesses.

Expert commentators are predicting that the current economic hardship has not yet reached its turning point but many of Northern Ireland's top business leaders are not waiting around. Many entrepreneurs make their fortunes at times of recession and we can all be sure that the opportunities are there. An economic downturn represents an opportune time to attract senior level talent into your business and at such a critical time you need to see real leadership among your board and senior team. There has been a challenging end to 2008, but with the right team, businesses must now look forward to the opportunities that present themselves in the New Year. Make it a great 2009.

Eye

Karl Webb is a Consultant in Northern Ireland's leading executive search and selection consultancy, Clarendon Executive. Karl or any member of the team can be contacted in confidence on 028 9072 5750. www.clarendonexecutive.com