

ASK ANNIE

Believe It or Not, a Labor Shortage Is Coming

And some experts say it will be even more severe than the last one. Plus, how to pinpoint jobs at FORTUNE 500 companies, and more on what to do about bad references.

FORTUNE

Tuesday, October 7, 2003

By Anne Fisher



Anne Fisher

Q. I know this isn't the kind of question you usually address, but please help! I have a son starting his junior year in high school who insists that he won't go to college. He's very bright, but says he's tired of school. When I try to explain that getting a good job may well depend on his having a good education, he points to recent statistics showing that this recession (and "jobless recovery") has hit college graduates right along with everyone else, so what's the point? Any suggestions on how to counter this argument?

A. For starters, two words: Things change. Since your son is partial to statistics, show him these. By 2010, the U.S. Department of Labor expects that U.S. companies will face a shortage of slightly more than 10 million workers. (That's partly because, while about 70 million baby boomers will retire—or at least reach retirement age—over the next 15 years, only 40 million new workers are expected to enter the workforce during the same period.) "This has happened before," says Neil Lebovits, president and COO of a specialty-staffing firm called Ajilon (<http://www.ajilonfinance.com>). "But when the 2010 labor shortage hits, it will supercede the one we faced in the late '90s, when companies bowed to their employees' every need and desire to keep them from leaving."

Service industries that require knowledge workers with specialized skills will be hit the hardest, he adds. "There are more than 90 million Americans whose literacy and numeric skills are at the 10th-grade level or below," says Lebovits. "If you consider education and training, the coming talent shortage and 'talent wars' will be even more serious." Hmm, let's see, in the year 2010, your son will be about 24 years old, right? If he does go to college and maybe even grad school, he'll very likely be in the enviable position of hitting the job market just when demand for educated workers is cresting. But, hey, he needn't take my word (or yours) for why going to college is generally a good idea. A year or so of supporting himself, or trying to, by working at a minimum-wage job could be pretty persuasive, too.

Q. After six years of being at two different start-ups—the second of which, my current employer, who is on extremely shaky ground financially—I'm fantasizing about working for a really big company, like maybe a FORTUNE 500 company. (For one thing, and I do know how ridiculous this sounds, a big company probably would not ask people to bring their own toilet paper and light bulbs from home, the way my

present employer does.) I've tried sorting through the listings on the big job boards to pick out only the jobs at very large companies, but it takes forever, and then some of those listings are outdated anyway. Do you have a better suggestion?

A. Well, the best approach to finding any new job is through networking. Do you know anyone (or even anyone who knows anyone) who works at a big company where you might like to work too? Ask around. Join professional associations and meet as many other people in your field as you can. Read trade publications to see which big companies are getting even bigger, and hence might be hiring now. You might also be interested in a new job site, CareerMole (<http://www.careermole.com>), which lists jobs at Fortune 500 employers exclusively. (The site was launched this past summer by a couple of guys in Philadelphia and is not affiliated with FORTUNE magazine.) On average, CareerMole lists about 140,000 jobs, and listings are updated daily. To access those listings, however, you must pony up \$19.99 a month for a subscription. Best of luck, and here's hoping you land someplace where the light bulbs are free.

Friends, a few more words about how to handle ex-bosses who badmouth you when prospective employers call them for a reference (see [last week's column](#)): Many thanks to reader Jim C., who wrote: "Try a reference checking service. There are several that pop up in an Internet search of 'employment reference services'.... They can get documented proof of any badmouthing by a former boss. If it rises to the legal standard necessary for action, you have the evidence to give your lawyer. And if it doesn't, at least you can find out what you need to address in future interviews"—and which references to drop from your list. He writes that he found this out the hard way, when an ex-boss proved to be a poisonous reference, and adds: "Most of these services will also check out other information about you, including driving records, credit reports, and criminal history. An inaccuracy here can really shoot you in the foot. The better informed you are, the better prepared you are!" How true.

Send questions to askannie@fortunemail.com.

[SUBSCRIBER LOGIN](#) | [HOME](#) | [COMPANIES](#) | [CEOs](#) | [INVESTING](#) | [CAREERS](#) | [TECHNOLOGY](#) | [SMALL BUSINESS](#) | [PDFs](#)

Services: [Downloads](#) | [Customer Service](#) | [Conferences](#) | [Special Sections](#) | [Free Product Info](#) | [FORTUNE Education Program](#)

Information: [Current Issue](#) | [Archive](#) | [Site Map](#) | [Press Center](#) | [Contact FORTUNE](#) | [Advertising Info](#)

© Copyright 2004 Time Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without permission is prohibited. You may make a single printed copy of this content, solely for your personal use. For all other uses, including commercial and academic uses, please visit www.FortuneReprints.com and www.FortunePermissions.com.

[Privacy Policy](#) [Terms of Use](#) [Disclaimer](#) [Contact Fortune](#)