

## **How International Companies Approach Talent Shortages in the Southeast**

Finding workers was the focus of a recent Workforce Symposium sponsored by *Tula Executive Search, Arnall Golden Gregory LLP, and Advantage Austria*. The topic was how international companies approach talent shortages.

Here is a quick recap.

According to Georgia Commissioner of Labor, Mark Butler, there are currently 85,000 unfilled jobs in Georgia. “We don’t need to create more jobs, we need to find more workers,” Butler said. The Georgia Labor Commissioner pointed out that the labor market would get worse. Currently 90% of HR directors in Georgia said in a recent survey that they were hiring, and that their number one source of talent was other companies.

It’s clear that the Southeastern US has a number of advantages for international companies: tax incentives, education, supplier, logistics and customers. But there are still challenges, including immigration policy, economic policies, and the availability of talent. *According to Michael Friedl, Austrian Trade Commissioner for the US, the solution will require the cooperation of states, the Federal government, and employers.*

**Jay Solomon**, an Arnall Golden Gregory attorney specializing in immigration law, told the group that immigration won’t solve the problem. Currently there are just 140,000 immigrant visas available in the United States, and this number includes workers, spouses and children. Solomon said he is seeing more and more denials of visa application and that 50% of all applications are questioned. What’s the solution? Make sure you understand the rules, Solomon advises, and you may need professional help. He went on to say that all statuses are available, but any immigration efforts require planning.

Peter Zimmerli, Consul General of Switzerland, gave the group an overview of how the Swiss Vocational, Professional and Educational Training System which seeks to provide employees for Swiss businesses. At age 15, following nine years of compulsory education, Swiss young people choose one of three tracks to continue their education: vocational, general education, or professional. Two-thirds of the students choose vocational and enter a two-year apprenticeship program. Following the apprenticeship, they enter the labor market. They also have the option at this point of enrolling in a classical university.

Forty percent of Swiss companies participate in the program, and the benefits, Zimmerli says, outweigh the costs.

But how do international companies who operate in the Southeast deal with hiring challenges?

Natasha Brower, head of human relations for the US operations of Belgium's OMP, says it's a challenge to find software engineers with 4 to 6 years experience. The supply simply isn't there, she says. They go to coding "boot camps" in search of talent, and invest in social media to tell the OMP story. But, she admits, the people they are seeking are working somewhere else.

Brower also counsels to involve current employees in the same age range as the prospect in the hiring process.

Andreas Thurner, apprenticeship manager of Blum USA, told the group about Blum's apprenticeship program. Blum partners with like-minded companies in the Charlotte area to recruit high school graduates. They work with school counselors and STEM program to find prospects. Once a prospect is identified, they are invited to an open house at participating companies and asked to bring a parent. At the open house there is a tour of the manufacturing facility as well as presentations on salary and benefits.

Prospects are given a placement test; a mechanical aptitude test, and their soft skills are evaluated. Then the prospect chooses a company. A six-week apprenticeship program follows during the summer.

Blum, like OMP, uses social media for recruitment, and believes there is an advantage to engaging peers in the recruiting process. "Recruiting requires a personal touch," Thurner said.

Bernard Vanderlande, CEO of Tula Executive Search, said, "There are challenges everywhere. Effective hiring practices require knowledge, preparation, innovation and careful execution. There is no easy solution."