

professor in their major field. Tapping into these seminars is the normal way to contact prospective employees.

Japanese companies mobilize their younger employees to inform students studying with their former professors about the company. These employees (senpai) can give their juniors (kohai) a good idea about the working conditions and opportunities in the company. Some foreign companies follow this practice. Sophia's Watanabe asserts that companies who provide personnel data, such as section and title, about former students to placement offices make it easier for students to inquire about a company. She recommends more companies maintain contact with placement offices.

While the Japanese practices are tried and true, they have been de-

veloped by large companies and benefit large, well-known companies. However a little innovation can pay off, as witnessed by the case of Nihon Digital Equipment Corporation (see box).

One area that foreign companies have been able to exploit is their popularity with women. This year, according to Recruit, NTT took over the top spot in popularity, but last year IBM Japan was the most popular choice for female job hunters and is number 2 this year. About 30 percent of IBM's new hires in 1986 were women.

Women are drawn to foreign companies for several reasons. The opportunities for advancement are better. Likewise, women are less affected by some of the factors that turn men away from foreign companies. Among these is a different

time frame. Most women are still not planning to be employed over decades so the instability perception is not as important.

SERIOUS COMMITMENT

Competitiveness in any market requires good personnel. In the long-run, if the Japan market is going to offer even broader opportunities to non-Japanese companies those companies will need to close the gap in the overall quality of personnel they are hiring.

Many companies are still not in a position in Japan where they can take on the responsibilities of hiring "lifetime" employees. Over time, the hiring environment should improve as foreign firms gain prestige and stability. (T. MURPHY)

LOOK BEFORE YOU LEAP

TBT: What are some of the dangers of recruiting?

Nevins: You need a minimum of 200 people and 10 years experience in the Japanese market before you can begin. It's better to have at least 300-500 people. If you don't have these, university professors are not going to take you seriously. To do it well, you need credibility with the professors. If you give the wrong impression it will be a lasting impression. It's an ideal to get good people from top schools but most foreign companies just can't get them. Also, many companies don't have the resources to absorb them and it's easy to get stuck with poor performers.

TBT: Why do firms recruit?

Nevins: It's the traditional way to hire in Japan. It's the traditional point of entry in firms, although that too is changing. Companies believe the students are unblemished. In Japanese the new recruits are called the "Golden Eggs" (Kin no tamago). It's easier to build loyalty with a new recruit. Also, the wages are very low.

TBT: What are students looking for?

Nevins: They want to join a company with high social recognition and status. They want to be proud to show their meishi (business card). They also follow trends very closely.



Thomas J. Nevins, Managing Director, Technics in Management Transfer, Inc.

TBT: Foreign companies are very popular among female students. Is hiring large number of females good business?

Nevins: Managers are looking at performance and there is a feeling in foreign firms that female workers are good performers. More and more managers are believing that women are a good buy for foreign companies.

TBT: Do labor laws restrict female

employees in any way?

Nevins: Since the implementation of the Equal Opportunity Employment Law on April 1, 1986, there are fewer restrictions. Overtime is limited to 6 hours per week or 150 hours per year, except during settlement of accounts. But the restrictions are not a major factor for recruiters.

TBT: Do you have any recommendations for companies that are recruiting or thinking about it?

Nevins: Companies should be in Japan for a long time and be well-established. They should be big. Consistency is very important. Once a company begins recruiting it's very important to continue. So this really involves a serious decision. Universities will not take you seriously if you recruit students on an intermittent basis.

The competition is severe. For example, in a typical year, 6,000 companies are trying to recruit 4,000 liberal arts graduates from Keio University (one of Japan's leading universities). While a number of popular companies employ more than 100 graduates each, only 900 companies are successful in recruiting a single graduate. It should be easy enough to evaluate your chances for success. Make sure you have a good person represent your recruitment effort. A firm cannot dabble with college recruitment.

(T.M.)