

The class of 2005 has different priorities from previous crops of grads entering the job market


MARK EIGHTH BLOSSAGE COURTESY ACQUITE

Salary and location take a back seat to skills fit and chance for professional development

By Douglas Walk

READY TO CLOCK IN ▲
This year's college graduates face a confusing job market, but many had received offers by March.

MILLIONS OF AMERICAN college students graduated last month, ready to join the workforce. They're very different from graduates 10 years ago, significantly different from even last year's graduates—and a little baffled by the state of the job market that awaits them.

"This generation is somewhat ill-defined, the workplace is ill-defined—it's a perfect match," jokes Bob Rosner, who writes the syndicated column *Working Wounded*.

Experience Inc., which sells recruiting software to colleges, has been surveying the past few years' worth of graduating classes. Vice president of marketing Janet Sun says that what drives students' career decisions varies from year to year.

Last year, their three most important criteria were salary, career advancement and location, Sun notes. But "it's not always about salary," she says, "and it's not always about location." Location, in fact, dropped significantly this year, from third place to 10th. The most important criteria now are a job that fits with their skills, professional development opportunity and company reputation and ethics.

The job market influences students' choices, allowing more room to be picky. About 25 percent of students had received job offers when Experience conducted its survey in March; last year, it was about 18 percent.

Amy Van Kirk, who handles campus recruit-

ing for PricewaterhouseCoopers, sees professional development as a key criterion. "Students these days want to take advantage of coaching opportunities, they want to be mentored, they want to learn," she says. "They're very eager to have a lot of hands-on exposure, to form relationships at PwC and with clients. They also expect a lot of ongoing development and on-the-job guidance. They want to make sure they're joining a company with the best technology, the best databases, the best access to information, and that there's enough structured training—not only when they start, but continuing throughout their career."

Sun has been telling recruiters that if their companies have formal learning plans in place, they should play that up to job candidates. "A lot of insurance companies who are hiring for very specialized positions, such as actuaries, have that sort of intense training process," she says. "They want to bring people on very early on. They're extremely careful about who they hire, and they don't want to lose these people because they're highly skilled. There's a very defined path, and your progress is very measurable."

Sun mentions Accenture and Vector Marketing as other companies that offer attractive professional development programs.

She also singles out Enterprise Rent-A-Car for its approach to hiring and training graduates. "They have an amazing program, training people in a lot of different roles," she says. "They bring in people they want to hold on to, and they grow them. That's completely unusual in their business—they don't hire college graduates or keep them on the front line at Avis or Hertz."

Marie Artim, Enterprise's assistant vice president of recruiting, explains: "The core philosophies of our business are behind (our recruiting message). We promote entirely from within, so anyone who comes in and looks at the entry-level career opportunities with our company can see that there's a lot of potential to build a career within the organization. We offer continual training, development, marketing and business skills."

West Michigan furniture company Herman Miller offers 100 percent reimbursement for continuing education, says Jack Schreur, director of employee and communications services. "You make it a part of your development plan and show how it relates to either your position now or a reasonably attainable position, and we'll pay for it," he says. >>

"The only true way to convince a worker, young or old, that loyalty is reciprocated is by demonstrating that value in your employment practices."

**—Eric Chester,
CEO of Generation Why**



"If you're really serious about hiring talented young people, you have to make sure the folks who come to you understand explicitly that there's not just the possibility for them to grow their talents through further education and training in the field, but there's that expectation. If you come in with the experience you've got and you leave with that same experience, you've failed as an employee and we've failed as an employer."

ETHICS AND INTEGRITY

The No. 3-ranked criterion in the Experience poll is company reputation

and ethics. A recent Harris Interactive poll found that far fewer employees of large companies than small companies feel that top management "displays integrity or morality" or "is committed to advancing the skills of employees."

Brice Tulgan, founder of research firm Rainmaker-Thinking and author of *Managing Generation X*, says that managers at large companies tend not to spend nearly as much time working with their direct reports as their counterparts at smaller companies. This makes the bureaucracy more faceless and even threatening to employees.

Eric Chester, author of *Getting Them to Give a Damn* and founder and CEO of Generation Why, suggests that companies should survey employees to see if they feel disconnected or disenfranchised. "By the very nature of their size, big companies tend not to communicate as in-depth with their front lines as

smaller companies do, leaving frontline talent at larger companies to feel lost in the shuffle. However, leading organizations, regardless of size, always know what their front line is thinking. ... (If employees) leave because they feel that management is not demonstrating integrity and morality, heads should roll."

Ethics and integrity are connected to another word that's important to new graduates: meaning. About 8.8 million people ages 16 to 24 do volunteer work, according to a September 2004 study by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. That's up from about 7.7 million two years ago. Many of them are looking for work that has some kind of significance in their community or in the world. Experience's Sun notes that although the most popular fields among new graduates are still financial services, accounting, engineering and computers, many students are interested in education, government work and nonprofits.

A lot of businesses are in the middle: They may not have tons of high-paid engineering jobs, but they're also not



110% overextended.

Some days, it's all you can do to stay organized. Between deadlines, budgets and regulations, it's hard to manage your commitments.

Hudson provides both project management and talented professionals to ease the load. Our innovative workforce solutions address both hiring strategies and organizational effectiveness - people and performance. So you can focus on being 100% in control.

- Skilled Resources
- Recruitment Process Outsourcing
- Project Management

Asia Pacific | Europe | North America
800.472.7260
www.hudson.com

Hudson

*From great people
to great performance™*

overtly altruistic. They need to appeal to young employees looking for meaning in what they do.

"The simple solution is to make the boring work meaningful," Chester says. "Make certain to connect those who are doing mundane tasks to the bigger picture, so that they can clearly see and are made to feel that they are not just entering data or putting Part A into Part B. They are a key part of saving lives, building energy-efficient housing or helping people increase their net worth."

CREATING MEANING

That's essentially what Herman Miller does to create meaning from making furniture. "We don't think we can differentiate ourselves by being the highest-paying employer; we differentiate ourselves on the idea of the employee experience," Schreier says. "Central to that is that we want people to come to work at Herman Miller because they get a sense of meaning here. We talk about it very explicitly: We say, making office furniture doesn't

provide meaning; creating great places to work, learn, heal and live *does* provide meaning—it makes a fundamental difference in the way people live."

Another goal for the class of 2005: They want to work to live, not live to work.

"When you get good at workforce flexibility, that's one of the things you can offer as a recruiting incentive," Tulgan says. "The health care industry is particularly in need of new workers, and it's become very wide practice to give nurses scheduling flexibility in exchange for working long hours."

Enterprise's Artin says that the company has been shifting from rewarding employees with monetary bonuses to giving more time off.

It's not as easy for every business to offer looser schedules, though. "We're still tweaking what our message is with flexibility," PwC's Van Kirk says.

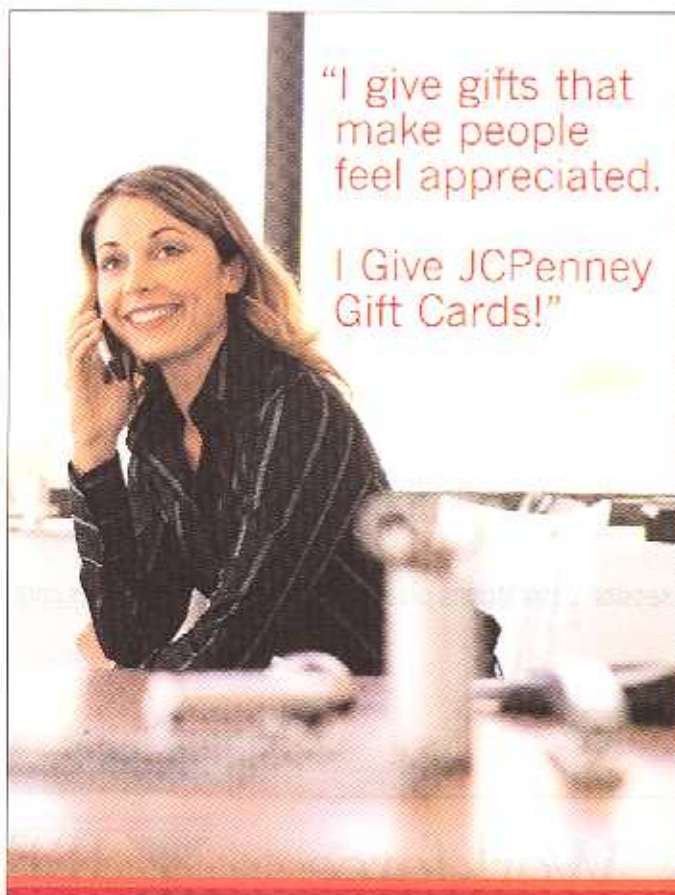
"In client services, when you come in as an entry-level associate, sometimes you don't have as much control over your schedule as you do when

you become a manager. We try to explain to people that the further they go, the more flexibility they'll get."

The other problem with talented employees on their first job is that they've often got an eye toward their second job—maybe because they believe that their company thinks they're expendable. Experience's poll found that 46 percent of this year's graduates are planning to stay with their first employer less than two years. "The only true way to convince a worker, young or old, that loyalty is reciprocated is by demonstrating that value in your employment practices," Chester says.

"If young people see older employees being casually discarded, they know that it will be just a matter of time before the same happens to them," he says. "If they see that longevity is rewarded, they'll feel more inclined to invest themselves fully." **wfma**

MORE ONLINE: Three ways to find young job candidates: workforce.com/genwhy




"I give gifts that make people feel appreciated. I Give JCPenney Gift Cards!"

Create Your Own Recognition Program...FREE!

Run a mini-recognition program in your company and see the power of JCPenney Gift Cards at work! Our Recognition Tool Kit includes everything you need to run a recognition program...thank you cards, award certificates and five \$10 JCPenney Gift Cards. It's yours with our compliments, just for taking our brief online survey at www.jcpgiftcard.com/workforce/.

For more information about designing your own JCPenney Gift Card program, call 800.832.GIFT (4438)!



*Offer Expires September 15, 2005.
Marketing Division International, Inc. is the exclusive representative of JCPenney member sales.