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Season of change

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FROM WEDNESDAY'S GLOBE AND MAIL

Last fall, Sean O'Donovan received offers to become a marketing vice-president from two different companies. He opted to join a startup software company in Toronto and says he enjoyed the job -- while it lasted.

When the company couldn't arrange long-term financing, it folded in August. So, now he finds himself on the job hunt again.

That's unfortunate but, as far as Mr. O'Donovan is concerned, the timing couldn't be better.

"I'm 100-per-cent confident that I'll land a new job this fall," says Mr. O'Donovan, a specialist in technology marketing and sales, who lives in Unionville, Ont.

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Sean O'Donovan who is in the job market for an executive position in sales and marketing with a technology company, poses for a photo in Toronto, Ontario Canada. O'Donovan, says he's confident that the market is so competitive he'll be able to land a good job. (*Deborah Baic/The Globe and Mail*)

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"September is the time to make a new start. And that makes this a great time to find a new job."

That seems to go against the popular wisdom -- but the experts say that Mr. O'Donovan's enthusiasm for an autumn job hunt is right on the money.

A recent poll by on-line job site Workopolis.com found that just 27 per cent of Canadians think of the fall as a good time to embark on a career change. That compares with 35 per cent who think of spring as the best job-hunting time, 24 per cent who consider winter the best time to shift career gears and 11 per cent who called summer the best job-hopping season (the remainder didn't know).

The number who don't put fall out front are missing the boat, says John Armitage, president of executive recruiter Armitage Associates Ltd. in Toronto.

The year in recruiting starts with a big peak in January and February as companies have new budgets and people make good on New Year's resolutions to make a career change, he says.

Spring actually is just a blip, followed by a slump in new-job searches in the summer.

"But then, there is a peak in September and October. And this year, it may be as big as the one after New Year," Mr. Armitage predicts.

So far this month, he says he has more executive searches on the go than at any other time this year, and "that means it's a real seller's market."

He says many candidates are seeing multiple job offers, salary offers are up by at least 10 per cent over the same time last year, and some employers are offering signing bonuses for top jobs that are up to 18 months of base salary -- the highest he's ever seen.

All this makes it a good time to get a jump on those who don't recognize the opportunity that the fall presents, says Patrick Sullivan, president of Workopolis.com, a partnership of Bell Globemedia, owner of The Globe and Mail, Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd. and Gesca Ltd.

"My advice is, don't follow the pack and wait for the winter. The fact is that the fall is a particularly good time for a career change, because many companies are gearing up to meet their goals for the year and are doing forward planning for next year," Mr. Sullivan says.

"The economy has been on a roll this year in Canada. And some sectors are really on fire," he adds.

For instance, the number of jobs posted on Workopolis in finance is up 31 per cent from a year ago and, for skilled trades, it's up 30 per cent. Other areas with substantial growth include biotechnology and hospitality and travel, both of which had been lagging as recently as the spring, he says.

Job postings are also growing fast in health care and all types of sales and marketing, says Gabriel Bouchard, vice-president and general manager of Monster.ca.

Over all, the on-line job site's listings are up 26 per cent over this time last year.

"That's telling us the demand for workers is significantly increasing in Canada," Mr. Bouchard says. "It's becoming increasingly challenging for them to find the calibre of candidates they are looking for, and that's driven by the increased level of competition for talent and the creation of new jobs in a growing economy."

A favourable market makes it easier for people to switch jobs because they can feel confident they will be able to find a new employer and, at the same time, competition is heating up for qualified people, Mr. Bouchard says.

And the job growth is occurring even at the highest salary levels, says Anthony Kaul, chief executive officer of Vancouver-based HigherBracket.ca, a website for jobs that pay more than \$100,000 a year.

The hot spot for executive positions at the moment is Alberta, with at least 50 per cent more listings on his site for high-level jobs in finance, engineering and sales of technology, he says.

Toronto is robust as well, with a 30-per-cent increase in executive postings, Mr. Kaul says. The Atlantic provinces are seeing growth of at least 10 per cent in listings, while the West has been stable.

For such postings, the search and interview process takes at least three months "so employers are starting now to have people in place by January," Mr. Kaul says. "But if a position is open and you fit the qualifications, it's also possible you can just move right in."

Mr. O'Donovan, for one, hopes to cash in on that war for talent. Last year, he says, he managed to land his job because "I came along with the right credentials at the time they had an opening and were looking to hire."

And he's sure he can do it again this year. He's been calling all his recruiting contacts and networking with people in the industry.

"It's a networking game, smattered with good luck and, of course, good timing," he says. "I think this is an excellent time to be searching for a new career."

Time of the season

Fall isn't just the time to gear up and get back to work after a summer of fun. Job pros say this season may offer the best opportunity of the year to make a big career move.

Here are some reasons to get your résumé in play from Patrick Sullivan, president of on-line job site Workopolis.com:

The fall brings a lift in enthusiasm after the summer doldrums. Employers will likely welcome pitches from job candidates. Or, if you're looking to make a step up with your present employer, you'll get a willing ear for your new ideas.

The economy is hot this fall, and companies are optimistic about growth and have plans for new projects and staff expansion.

With people back at work, fall is an excellent time to network. Companies are planning budgets and staffing this fall for the new year. If a good candidate turns up now for a new position being planned, an employer may decide not to wait and hire immediately.

There's a trend in some industries for companies to shift the start of their year from the new year to the fall. Accounting and media

organizations have already made the change and have new budgets for hiring.

The fall is the time when retailers expand staffs for the holiday season.

By making a job change this fall while the economy is hot, you'll ensure you get the job you want. Hesitating runs the risk that the economy might chill and shrink opportunities in the new year.

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