

# Industry searches for fresh skills

**In an exclusive interview with Oil & Gas Technology, Bill French, executive search director at Worldwide Worker, explains some of the skills and manpower issues facing the energy industry today**

**Oil & Gas Technology:** There is a great deal of talk about the industry suffering from a lack of skilled personnel - how serious do you believe this problem to be and is it a current problem or one that we are building up to?

**French:** The lack of skilled personnel is a current and ongoing, serious problem facing all facets of the energy industry including oil and gas companies, oilfield service companies, oilfield manufacturing companies, engineering and construction companies and the entire downstream sector. This situation has existed for at least two years and it is projected to last for at least another five to ten years.

Not only does it affect the production of oil but also the production of the equipment needed to produce and process oil and gas. The ongoing need to staff infrastructure projects for both facilities and transportation-oriented projects, now estimated at over USD 150 billion, continues to be a pressing global need at all levels especially in project management and project controls and supply chain management.

**Oil & Gas Technology:** Are there any areas of the oil and gas industry that are suffering right now as a result of skills or personnel shortages?

**French:** The entire supply chain of the oil and gas industry is affected by the shortage of personnel. This ranges from qualified welders in manufacturing facilities to all types of technical personnel including: geotechnical and process-oriented engineers, project managers, production and petroleum engineers and drilling personnel of all types. The critical need is for mid level personnel, ranging from 7 to 15 years of experience. This was brought about by a double edged sword. Few people entered the oil and gas and energy industry during the turbulent 1990's and early 2000's because of

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**Oil & Gas Technology:** What can be done, and what is being done, to tackle these issues?

**French:** There are several ongoing programmes that have been launched by the industry itself trying to change the image of the industry by educating the masses on the diversity of the energy sector and the challenging careers available for those who want to make a difference. However, the only other real temporary solution we have been seeing is the hiring of short term contractors who are essentially retirees who command very high day rates because of the critical demand. There is also an effort to recruit from other industries where similar positions may exist such as project managers and process engineers. However there are few comparables such as geologist, geophysicist and petroleum and drilling engineers. Some universities which actually dropped or cut back their petroleum engineering programmes have re-started the courses and are actively recruiting for these.

**Oil & Gas Technology:** How does Worldwide Worker play a part in meeting the energy sector's diverse recruitment issues?

**French:** Worldwideworker.com offers a wide range of human resource solutions to assist companies in facing these

challenges. Through our database of nearly 300,000 energy industry personnel, we are capable of providing timely local solutions to global issues for all segments of the industry.

Our manpower group provides quick response for critical company needs for both short term and extended term contract consultants in areas where companies prefer to use contactors as opposed to hiring new employees. Our job postings and recruiting services, including executive search, not only provide solutions to human resource issues but also, in conjunction with our media packages and recruitment events, provide companies with positive advertising, utilising our vast network of people and companies through various internet-based media products.

**Oil & Gas Technology:** How have you seen industry requirements shift in recent years, for instance, in the move from conventional to unconventional hydrocarbons, onshore to offshore, and how have these affected recruitment?

**French:** One of the most significant issues is the large amount of capital investment required for the new projects. Offshore rigs cost billions. The associated cost of a liquefied natural gas (LNG) project in terms of the liquefaction plant, re-gasification plant and the transportation vessel requires excellent project management and project controls personnel as well as the actual construction personnel. In terms of day rates for a rig, the day rates are such that the companies cannot afford

not to have the necessary personnel. Therefore, timely recruiting is essential. Likewise, in the engineering and construction industry, whereby companies really cannot hire the proper people for a project until the contract is won, the immediacy of the needs is the driving force. In several of the new areas of unconventional hydrocarbons, transferable skills must be found both in the industry and outside the sector.

**Oil & Gas Technology:** How do you think oil companies, and the industry overall, can better equip themselves and prepare for the future challenges posed by an ever-changing energy industry, and one that relies increasingly on high technology and skills?

**French:** The ongoing public relations and advertising campaign to improve the image of the industry is a good start. Very few people realise that many of the leaders in the alternative fuels industry are actually the oil companies. The need to keep attracting highly qualified engineers and technical experts from the world's best universities will continue to be a challenge. The other issue that companies and countries will have to address is the global distribution of qualified candidates to meet the ongoing needs. China, India and Russia are the only countries which are producing the necessary amount of engineers and technical personnel to satisfy their own needs. How and when these individuals are integrated into the global industry is a key challenge the industry faces. ■