

Companies Struggle to Keep Their Tech Workers From Logging Off; In seller's market for IT talent, CIOs redouble efforts to retain skilled workers

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FULL TEXT

Many information-technology workers in the U.S. are on the hunt for new jobs, seeking a wider array of remote work options, better chances for promotions and bigger paychecks, as Covid-19 restrictions ease and the economy rebounds.

That has many employers redoubling efforts to recruit and retain skilled IT workers, who were already in short supply before the coronavirus pandemic.

"Companies across all industries are struggling to secure this talent and in many cases new hires are simply replacing recent departures," said Craig Stephenson, managing director of the North America technology officers practice at consulting firm Korn Ferry.

At the same time, demand for workers with expertise in engineering, cloud computing, data analytics and cybersecurity has never been higher, as companies retool post-pandemic operations with digital technology, Mr. Stephenson said.

Combined with a chronically low supply of tech talent, IT job seekers are eyeing an enticing seller's market, according to recruiters and analysts.

Roughly a third of more than 2,800 IT professionals in a recent survey conducted by Robert Half International Inc. said they plan to look for a new job in the next few months. Most told the global staffing company they were after a higher salary or that their current job offered few opportunities for advancement. The survey was conducted between March and April in more than two dozen major U.S. cities.

Most employers saw unusually low turnover in the past year, said Jeffrey Weber, executive director of Robert Half's technology division, adding that survey results suggest IT workers who likely held off on making a move during the pandemic are now ready to go.

Employees in other fields are also shopping around for new jobs, biding their time as there are more job openings in the U.S. and fewer people in the labor force than before the pandemic struck in March 2020.

U.S. employers last month increased payrolls by 559,000 jobs , up from 278,000 in April, but down from 785,000 in March.

Last month, employers posted more than 365,000 job openings for IT workers, the highest monthly total since September 2019, according to IT trade group CompTIA. Demand was highest for software and application developers, IT support specialists, systems engineers and architects, IT project managers and systems analysts. Yet employers have been unable to fill these positions in recent months, a sign that many qualified workers are holding out for other opportunities, said Tim Herbert, CompTIA's executive vice president for research and market intelligence.

"Workers seeking new career advancement opportunities is a healthy sign of a dynamic labor market," Mr. Herbert said. "Those moving into new positions create opportunities for others looking to break into the IT field."

But high turnover rates may also reveal cracks in workplace practices and even corporate cultures, he added. For instance, fewer remote-work options can be a deal breaker in the post-Covid labor market.

Corrado Azzarita, global chief information officer at Kraft Heinz Co., said luring or retaining IT talent can no longer be limited by geography.

"We are designing a digital employee experience that allows for hybrid, in-person or remote," Mr. Azzarita said. Attracting and retaining workers with remote-work options means investing in advanced communications and collaboration tools, said David Vidoni, vice president of IT at software firm Pegasystems Inc.

He said the company, which had staff working across the country and overseas during the pandemic, has beefed up its remote-work tool kit with motion-sensing video cameras and virtual whiteboarding solutions.

"They get to live in a place that best suits them and we get to keep them," he said. "I believe our willingness to let people work from anywhere is only increasing our chances of getting, and keeping the best talent."

At Capital One Financial Corp., technology recruiters hope that room to grow inside the company through training programs will help develop and retain IT workers.

To develop a bench of homegrown software engineers, Capital One offers internal training and reskilling programs, along with a six-month intensive training program in computer coding for college graduates who don't have computer science degrees, said Diane Lye, executive vice president and CIO of card technology.

More than 300 full-time technology workers at Capital One have gone through the computer coding training program, which currently has 100 participants, she said.

"The days of four years of school and you're done are in the past," Ms. Lye said.

Write to Angus Loten at angus.loten@wsj.com

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Credit: By Angus Loten

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