

MY CAREER

Issue of the week Max Berry



People power

Scrutiny from managed funds is encouraging the companies they invest in to offer a high standard of people management, a new study finds.

Some institutional investors these days are regularly meeting the companies in which they invested their members' funds to ensure they adopt "high-commitment human resources practices", according to the study by Melbourne University's law faculty. These big funds are not promoting training and development, flexible working hours, performance-based pay and autonomous teams out of ethics or concern for employees.

The funds' main goal is to get good long-term returns for members and there is a growing acceptance that a company's people practices are an indicator of broader management standards, including business strategy, which largely determines the firm's value in the long run. The trend is still getting under way, but the growing scrutiny by funds of the work practices of "investee companies" is ultimately driven by their need to control their risk exposure, the study says.

For example, one super fund looks at the staff turnover and safety performance of companies to gain a feel for the governance risk companies represent. It is more often about screening out investment in companies with poor practices — shown, say, by an industrial dispute — because they represent unacceptable risks, rather than in fostering better practices in companies in which the fund already has a stake.

Institutional investors seek to influence practices in companies by proxy voting, letters to chief executives, and by meeting the managers.

Lack of information about what is going on inside companies is the biggest hurdle facing funds seeking to engage business on human resources practices, but public companies face growing pressure to disclose their non-financial performance in sustainability reports.

The report, *Do Australian Institutional Investors Aim to Influence the Human Resources Practices of Investee Companies*, by Kirsten Anderson, Shelley Marshall and Ian Ramsay, suggests public companies may adopt the best HR practices to attract and retain investment from managed funds.

After an official survey revealed one in three Australians declared they were overworked (a minority were prepared to sacrifice pay and work fewer hours), institutional investors may be a powerful force for work-life balance. Pity it only works for public companies on the funds' radar screens.

FOOT IN THE DOOR

Runaway start

Michael Dimopoulos is managing director of the Recruitment Academy.

I GREW up in a traditional Greek family, working in a takeaway business where I learnt the customer-service ethic from a young age. I always fantasised about being an executive, working in the corporate arena.

At 21, I ran away from home (a big thing in my family) because I knew there was something else out there for me.

I took a job selling gym memberships for a fitness club in Sydney and within two years was lecturing at conventions on corporate health and fitness.

With no tertiary qualifications, I still wanted to work in the corporate sector and earn some real dollars, so I went for an interview with Julia Ross (Ross Human Directions). They knew I was a bit of a rough diamond but could see I had great customer-service experience, good energy and passion, so they hired me on the spot.

I started at Julia Ross as an account manager and eventually moved up to national accounts sales management. After 4½ years there I was invited to work at Morgan Banks (now Hudson), where I stayed for 2½ years in strategic solutions-selling before returning to Julia Ross as national director of its most prestigious accounts.

My portfolio of clients grew to include the NSW Government, Citigroup, National Australia Bank, Macquarie Bank, Qantas, Cadbury Schweppes, ANZ, Spotless, PWC, ATO, Centrelink, Defence Housing Authority, Westpac, Sensis, TeleTech and KPMG. My earning capacity also grew to more than \$200,000.

At 39, I knew that if I didn't attempt a career change and launch my own business by the age of 40, I'd be stuck wondering "what if?". I resigned from recruitment sales in March last year and started Recruitment Academy the following month.

After years of double-digit growth, the number of trained, industry-savvy professionals available to recruitment firms is shrinking. Meanwhile, recruitment consultants are expected to be trained in all types of interviewing and to be knowledgeable about many industry types.

I could see that many new and established consultants hadn't been inducted or trained properly for the industry, so I took the risk and launched the academy in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane to bridge the skills gaps.

I now have a large portfolio of recruitment agencies who want consultants from all sorts of backgrounds — banking and finance, accounting, hospitality, sales and marketing, IT — pre-inducted into the industry.



Michael Dimopoulos knows what makes a good recruiter.

PICTURE: DREW RYAN

Good recruiters are quite sales-focused. They're articulate, can juggle activities, and have compassion for the people they're interviewing.

They also take ownership of their role, are interested in a consultative career and know the industry they're recruiting for.

At entry level, the recruitment industry is one of the few in the corporate arena that you don't need a tertiary qualification for. You do, however, need maturity

and to fit culturally with an organisation.

Entering the industry without a specialisation could earn you \$40,000-\$60,000. In middle management, with some specialisation, you could earn \$60,000-\$120,000. I also know recruiters earning \$300,000-\$400,000.

In most cases, you earn a salary plus commissions, which vary between organisations.

MARCELLA BIDINOST

KEEP IT CASUAL

Still in its infancy, the Accent Music and Language Centre is seeking to expand its operations by recruiting five to 10 casual employees to teach singing, violin, kinder music, French and Italian lessons.

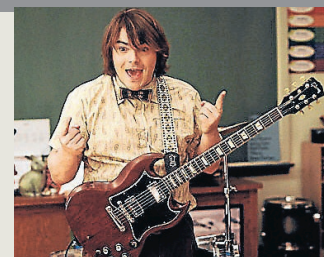
"There's every possibility that we'll need even more teachers as we grow," says office manager Carolyn Rogers.

Music teachers make at least \$25 an hour, and language teachers generally make \$20-\$25

an hour, but they can make more, depending on the number of pupils they have in their class.

Applicants with diplomas and degrees are viewed favourably by employers, but those who can demonstrate other relevant expertise and experience are encouraged to apply too.

"If it's for language subjects, for example, it's preferable if they're native speakers or people who have lived in the country for some time and who have a



good understanding of the language and culture. We also need people who can teach very young children — the kinder age — as well as the older adults and people with disabilities."

Successful applicants can

expect to work two to 20 hours a week, Ms Rogers says.

"We try to work around the teachers' schedules. They have other obligations, so we try to get them to nominate the dates they're available and then we try to get them students to fit with those days."

JOSH JENNINGS

Send cover letters and resumes to info@accentcentre.com.au or contact Carolyn Rogers on 0413 244 877.

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