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## **EMPLOYERS URGED TO NURTURE STAFF AHEAD OF ECONOMIC RECOVERY**

Despite the decline in employment revealed last week by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, employers must start nurturing their best staff now, ahead of the expected economic recovery, warns specialist finance recruitment firm, Robert Half.

“The global financial crisis has become synonymous with hiring freezes, pay freezes, limited opportunities for promotion and, in some cases, pay cuts for those still in work,” said Andrew Brushfield, Director of Robert Half.

“Employees have played second fiddle to their manager’s cost-cutting priorities and haven’t been given proper attention or investment since the onset of the global financial crisis.”

But with the unemployment rate remaining steady at 5.8% for three months in a row and forecasts that the worst of the downturn is behind us, employers need to reverse their thinking before employees once again have the confidence to shop around.

“It’s not yet an employee’s market but it soon will be. Employers must nurture their best talent now to keep them on board in the good times,” said Brushfield.

A new report released by Robert Half on the ‘Hidden Business Opportunities in the Downturn’ makes clear recommendations for employers to maximise opportunities in the downturn and prepare for market recovery. It urges employers to identify their top performers and develop the leadership qualities of these staff.

“Downturns create a testing ground for budding stars and provide an opportunity to identify and groom an organisation’s future leaders. Employers should let staff know now is the time to shine, motivate people to increase their scope of work and enable their top performers to move into more advanced and senior positions within the firm in the future.

“This of course benefits both parties because employees feel nurtured and see growth opportunities, and employers can build their succession plans and count on a committed workforce,” he said.

Microsoft agrees, with its managers using different strategies for nurturing staff during times of uncertainty. One of these is the use of ‘mentoring rings’ to help prepare company leaders through times of recession.

“Rather than a traditional one-on-one relationship, groups of mentors are pulled from accounting, finance and audit departments and dedicated to high-potential individuals,” explained Taylor Hawes, Chief Financial Officer, Intellectual Property and Licensing of Microsoft.



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“These highly confidential groups of up to 12 people meet once a month to brainstorm ways of supporting high-potential employees to enhance their positive attributes and actualise what they aspire to,” said Hawes. He believes that these types of grooming strategies benefit their own personnel whilst also benefiting Microsoft’s long-term future success.

Internally, Robert Half recently conducted its own employee survey to gauge the morale of its staff and ensure they are nurtured. “It’s about involving staff in the business,” said Brushfield. “This type of survey is something every company should be looking at doing.”

Robert Half’s report outlines seven strategies for employers to maximise their opportunities in the downturn, ahead of market recovery. It recommends:

1. Creative New Approaches – Employers are urged to actively try new approaches that address the shifting tastes and demands of their customer base. Now is not the time for ‘safe strategies’
2. Nourishing Grassroots Ideas – Make it a part of your culture for staff to constantly provide fresh ideas for the business, based on what they see ‘in the trenches’
3. Strengthen Your Talent Bench – Prudently hire talented individuals who can help you to maximise opportunities now and in the future
4. Build a More Flexible Staffing Strategy – Turn fixed costs into variable ones with a smart talent mix
5. Invest in Training to Enhance Productivity – Training is one of the first things to be cut in a downturn. In fact, a recent Robert Half survey revealed one in five CFOs don’t expect to offer employee training in the next two years. But these initiatives don’t just keep employees’ skills current; they also boost productivity and job satisfaction
6. Identify and Groom Future Leaders – View the downturn as a testing ground for budding stars
7. Increase Efficiencies – this is an ideal time to develop exit strategies for projects that don’t deliver optimal value

“Challenging times can often bring out the best and worst in employees. While some fail under the pressure of difficult economic surroundings, others stand up and take the lead. It’s an employer’s job to recognise, nurture and take advantage of these performers to ensure they stay on board when the market recovers,” Brushfield concluded.

Visit [www.uncertaineconomy.com/employeradvice](http://www.uncertaineconomy.com/employeradvice) for access to the full report.

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## **About Robert Half**

Robert Half International Inc. (RHI) pioneered specialised staffing services and today is the world’s leader in the field. Founded in 1948, the company is traded on the New York Stock Exchange (symbol: RHI) and operates four separate divisions in Australia, each serving distinct markets. They include: Robert Half Finance & Accounting, for temporary and permanent finance and accounting personnel; Robert Half Financial Services Group, for high-calibre finance and banking professionals; Robert Half Management Resources, for specialised interim financial professionals and OfficeTeam, for highly skilled temporary administrative support. There are more than 360 Robert Half International staffing locations worldwide. *In 2009 Robert Half International was ranked number one in our industry on FORTUNE® magazine’s list of the “World’s Most Admired Companies.”*

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