

F&F Job Trends

In-demand jobs, challenges in the hiring process and a need for a new generation

Today's flavor and fragrance industry job market is improving slowly, says David Wilson, principal at RLG Associates.^a Wilson, who tracks hiring trends in spans as small as 30–90 days, says that while there is traction in the market, some areas are hotter than others. Meanwhile, he adds, the industry is hobbled by a lack of mobile candidates, inefficient hiring processes and a lack of clear generational succession.

What's in demand: "It's a good time for technical people," says Wilson, whose industry background skews toward the flavor sector. Currently, he notes a need for technical staff in areas such as reaction flavors and specialists in confectionary, oral care and similar categories. While he sees some demand for sales positions, Wilson notes that these openings tend to be part of a "domino effect" within organizations, rather than organic growth. Driving demand for technical staff are three factors: 1) the improving economy, 2) the reluctance or inability of good candidates to relocate and 3) a lack of new, younger candidates in the pipeline.

Difficulty of immobile candidates: The decline of the US housing market has had a sweeping effect on workers in every industry. According to the National Association of Home Builders, housing foreclosures in the United States will peak this year. As a result, good job candidates who are willing to change jobs may not be able to do so as real estate realities may anchor them to their present location. An additional consideration is the continued high number of two-income households. Wilson—whose territory generally centers on the New Jersey, Cincinnati and Chicago regions—adds that companies are not helping with moving costs as much as they have in the past, excepting some cases for senior management. The bottom line: It can be very difficult to move. And even when a candidate is willing to move, Wilson notes that flavor and fragrance professionals are reluctant to be "last-in" in an organization and risk the attendant lack of seniority and job security.

The next generation: Wilson says that, had they had the interest, he would have recommended a flavorist career for his own children. Given the quality of a technical professional career track, then, why is there a lack of younger candidates rising through the ranks? Wilson points out that companies may not invest as

many resources into training compared to years past, in part because they may be reluctant to educate future competition. As a result, there is a clear generation gap among today's technical candidates: too few people are prepared to "move up the chain." In addition, Wilson cites the low enrollment in food science programs in the United States. According to a recent report authored by Joe Hunnings, Mary Marchant and Bill Richardson of Virginia Tech and Tim Mack of Indiana University of Pennsylvania and issued by the Food and Agricultural Education Information System (<http://faeis.ahnrit.vt.edu>), "the number of doctorate degrees awarded [in food science and technology programs] has been declining" in the period 2006–2009. "There's somewhat of an aging population in all categories," says Wilson. "The feeder lanes are thinner. This gets into the applications area, where food science becomes the primary background. Those people can go into packaged goods roles or flavor company positions. We hear and see ... that the primary feeder schools that have provided food science people are really struggling. The number of students going into food science is diminished. It's here now—it's a challenge. That will have down-the-road effects on availability, too." The question then becomes, he says, "How do you make food science more appealing to 18- and 20-year-olds?"

Poor hiring process: Adding to the challenges faced by both potential employers and employees is what Wilson describes as a generally inefficient hiring process in the flavor and fragrance industry. In some cases companies may post job announcements on career websites and then receive a deluge of irrelevant candidates. Sorting through overwhelming responses and focusing on the handful of legitimate candidates can be difficult, he says. In addition, the hiring company may assign a staffer who is under-experienced within the industry and is thus unable to spot key attributes in candidates that will be of most value to the company. As a result, good candidates could be overlooked. On the other side of the equation, Wilson explains that candidates rarely give themselves enough time to prepare a resume and develop a personal strategy in anticipation of a change in their employment status. This can lead to a low-quality presentation. Similarly, when a candidate is underprepared they may flood the industry with resumes, at times losing track of which organizations have already received their information. The lesson, he concludes: Prepare ahead of time.

Do you have a story to share about career searches in the flavor and fragrance industry or advice to impart? Contact us at jallured@allured.com or join the discussion on LinkedIn (Perfumer & Flavorist (P&F) Magazine; www.linkedin.com).

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