

Firms cater to employee development efforts

BY PAULA MOORE
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An engineer at one of the world's largest automakers was assigned to make presentations about her team's work, but she hated the task and was about to quit.

While working with a Denver-area organizational development firm, Employers Edge Inc., the engineer's boss realized that, in the name of professional growth, he was pushing the woman to do something against her natural aptitude. Changes were made, and the engineer stayed with the company.

"The best thing to do is put people with jobs where they have natural ability, and let them perform," said Janet McCracken, CEO of Employers Edge. "They'll do 20 percent better."

In a bad economy, companies tend to cut "soft" costs such as employee development, leadership training and testing candidates for open jobs — services provided by Employers Edge and another local consultant, Emergenetics International. But they shouldn't, according to business experts.

Those services can help companies save money and have a competitive edge — both in the short and long terms.

It can cost \$7,000 to replace a salaried employee who quits or isn't performing well, \$10,000 for a midlevel person and \$40,000 for a senior executive, according to human resources experts. And companies need to keep developing leaders for when the economy rebounds.

"Our clients are telling us that, in today's economy, they need to do more with resources they have; they need to work with current personnel and get the most out of them. ... That's why they're still working with us," said Morgan Browning, president of Centennial-based Emergenetics International.

"You need to be prepared for the future, as well, when things ramp up; you need leaders for that," said Suzanne Deremo, a human resources professional in Southern California and longtime Employers Edge client.

Finding the right fit for employees

The organizational development companies use methods, including workplace assessment and personality testing, to help clients put the right people in the right jobs, whether they're new hires or longtime employees. To make sure people do their best work, the consultants use training and coaching to help employees and managers communicate better, teams work more effectively and CEOs lead more wisely.

"The key to assessment is you've got to do something with it," said Ed Beard, president of Employers Edge. "You've got to develop the workplace around it."

Because of the economic downturn, clients have asked both consulting firms to teach in-house human resources people how to train employees, and they're doing it.

"The best companies have learned, over time, that it's better to take a long-term view and not cut back on human resources, even when it's tempting to do it. ... They realize it's better to pay the price in the short term to reap benefits long term," said Karen Dowd, executive director of the Suitts Center for Graduate Career Services at the University of Denver's Daniels College of Business.

Western Union Co. (NYSE: WU), based in Englewood, has continued working with Emergenetics, even in the downturn,



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Emergenetics International executives (clockwise from lower left) Mark Miller, director of marketing; Morgan Browning, president; Karen Hulett, program director; and Geil Browning, CEO and founder, display their Emergenetics profiles. The profiles are color-coded and based on a person's thinking style.

DETAILS

Company: Emergenetics International
Headquarters: 2 Inverness Drive East, Suite 189, Centennial, Colo. 80112
Principals: Geil Browning, founder/CEO; Morgan Browning, president
Website: www.emergenetics.com
Fees: \$149 for online profile plus debriefing, Emergenetics trainer certification \$2,500-\$5,500

Company: Employers Edge Inc.
Headquarters: 12835 E. Arapahoe Road, Tower 1, Suite 200, Centennial, Colo. 80112
Principals: Janet McCracken, CEO; Ed Beard, president
Website: www.theemployersedge.com
Fees: \$60 for a training module, \$12,600 for a four-day consulting session

on things such as leadership training, project management and team building.

"Emergenetics has become part of our culture," said Ken Champagne, Western Union's director of training. "At this point, the business demands we facilitate it. We're always looking for a way to help people be successful that's cost-effective; that's Emergenetics."

When businesses are ready to hire, working with consultants can help them make the most appropriate choices.

"Companies are always telling me they're looking for the best and brightest," Dowd said. "But I don't want them to do that; I want them to look for the right fit. These [consulting] firms can help with that."

Emergenetics' system is based on right brain/left brain research founder and CEO Geil Browning did as a grade school teacher



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Employers Edge president Ed Beard and Janet McCracken, CEO. Business is up 33 percent this year.

and administrator in the 1970s and '80s. As a result of that work, she created the Emergenetics profile.

The profile, which is based on a test, shows a person's thinking style — analytic, structural, social and conceptual — as well as their behavioral attributes — expressiveness, assertiveness and flexibility. Those attributes are color-coded to make them easier to use.

"The profile helps you understand how you think and behave," Geil Browning said. "When you understand those underlying things, you can [operate more deeply and powerfully]."

Emergenetics' business was down 20 percent in 2009, and it lost hotel-industry clients particularly, but the family-owned company expects to grow 75 percent this

year from last year. Morgan Browning is Geil Browning's son.

Started about 20 years ago, Emergenetics employs 20 people, and has 700 independent contractors, from Europe to Asia, who use the Emergenetics system. Emergenetics is expanding globally, including moving into India.

Employers Edge is 20 years old and has 17 employees. The company was started in California and moved to Colorado in 2007. Its No. 1 program is teamwork building, according to McCracken.

Employers Edge's business is up 33 percent this year, according to the company, and it hopes to hire another 17 people by June 2011.

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