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The jobs outlook? Monster

Jeff Taylor, Monster.com's founder, predicts an exploding need for talent as boomers depart.

By TOM ZUCCO, Times Staff Writer
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TAMPA - The man who helped change the way people find a job pointed to a chart that showed how millions of baby boomers will soon be leaving the work force, and a sly grin crept across his face.

"We are headed toward the worst employment crisis ever," said Jeff Taylor, founder of Monster.com.

The looming labor shortage will be so severe, Taylor added, that professions such as nursing will be forced to ask retirees to come back to work.

"A low-supply, high-demand environment," he said. "By 2008, the war for talent will be over and the employees will have won."

That's all the 200 or so job seekers who came to the Tampa Convention Center this week needed to hear. The event was part of a career expo sponsored by the Tampa Bay WorkForce Alliance, a nonprofit job placement and training organization funded through the Labor Department.

"This is better than good news," whispered Paul Winder, a stock analyst seated in the back row.

There was more to come.

A college dropout who returned to get his degree after he became a multimillionaire by building Monster.com into the world's largest job search Web site, Taylor looks like Elvis Costello and works a conference room like a Tony Robbins/Robin Williams hybrid. At one point, he convinced nearly all of the well-dressed, mostly 40-something audience to remove a shoe and hold it up. To make a point about risk-taking.

Taylor is something of an expert in that area. In 2000, he waterskied behind a Monster.com blimp for more than 3 miles along the Florida coast off Panama City to break a Guinness world record previously held by one of his heroes, Virgin Group CEO Richard Branson.

The stunt paid off. Monster.com got the media coverage Taylor wanted, just as it did that same year when, the day after Coca-Cola announced 2,000 layoffs, a pair of Monster.com blimps appeared over Coke's Atlanta headquarters.

There is no better time, Taylor said, slipping his own shoe back on, to break away and look for a new job.

But how Taylor's rosy picture translates to the local job market is more of a mixed bag. Faced with issues such as affordable housing and competition from larger markets, employers in the Tampa Bay area sometimes have to work extra hard to find and keep the people they want.

"We are competing nationally for talent," said Jamie Melendez, the WorkForce Alliance's director of communications. "Boston, Atlanta, Chicago ... those cities are a draw. But we're certainly going to do our share to recruit and train people for our area."

The jobs are here, Melendez said, especially in the fields of professional services, technology, business consulting and health care.

But the offer of a good salary may not be enough.

"The job seekers today are more interested in benefits and flexibility of work schedules," Melendez said, "as opposed to just higher salary. They're interested in creativity, growing and learning."

And unlike previous generations, younger workers don't expect to rely on pensions for their retirement. "They're more interested in 401(k) and investment plans," she said.

But for Taylor, 45, issues such as health care benefits and pension funds would have to wait. He had an hour, and his focus was finding a better job, not what happens afterward.

Those perfect jobs won't simply fall into everyone's lap, he said. Workplace dynamics have changed dramatically. The old organizational chart with the bosses at the top and every employee having a specific task is far more fluid now. And technological demands seem to increase daily.

A pen and appointment book are now a Blackberry, a couple of cell phones and a laptop.

"If you don't embrace change," Taylor warned, "it may not be a friendly embrace when it embraces you."

He used himself as an example. After founding Monster Board in 1994, an online bulletin board that morphed into Monster.com, Taylor stepped aside in August to start Eons, a company designed to cater to Americans 50 and older.

"When I founded Monster.com, the average age of the person filing a resume was 38," he explained. "Now, that person is 50."

Exactly what services Eons will provide when it opens in July remains a company secret. Taylor has defined it only as a "media company".

But he has told investors, and they like the idea. He recently raised \$10-million in venture capital to get the company up and running.

That one move personifies Taylor. He can get people to do things. When he was in middle school, he occasionally persuaded his parents to stop the family car when they passed road kill so he could gather feathers or hair to use for his fly fishing lures.

"He has never been in the mainstream," his mother once said.

Taylor has driven a truck, washed dishes, worked as a disc jockey, and while a student at the University of Massachusetts, he started a business selling "survival kits" to freshman. It was little more than a candy bar, a map of the campus, a toothbrush and a bottle opener. The idea never really took off.

But Taylor did.

The concept for Monster.com came to him when a client for the ad agency he worked for told him he didn't want big ideas. He wanted "a monster idea."

Taylor envisioned an online bulletin board for job seekers and launched Monster Board in 1994. A year later, the idea became Monster.com, the 454th registered domain on the Web.

But being among the first job-connection Web sites wasn't enough.

In 1999, Monster.com was one of the first Internet businesses to buy advertising spots during the Super Bowl.

The first ad was the "When I grow up I want to ..." spot that featured children looking stone-faced into a camera. They finished the sentence by saying things like "become a yes man" and "file all day." The ad was an instant hit, and the Monster was loose.

Although some data suggest as many as 60 percent of Americans found their job through a personal network or a referral, Taylor said that one out of three Americans looking for work, or about 63-million people, have a resume on Monster.com.

He remains an adviser to the company, and to anyone else who wonders about the importance of hiring the right person for the right job.

"Companies won't go out of business because they didn't make enough sales or profits weren't good enough," he said. "They'll go out of business because they aren't good at finding and keeping talent."

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