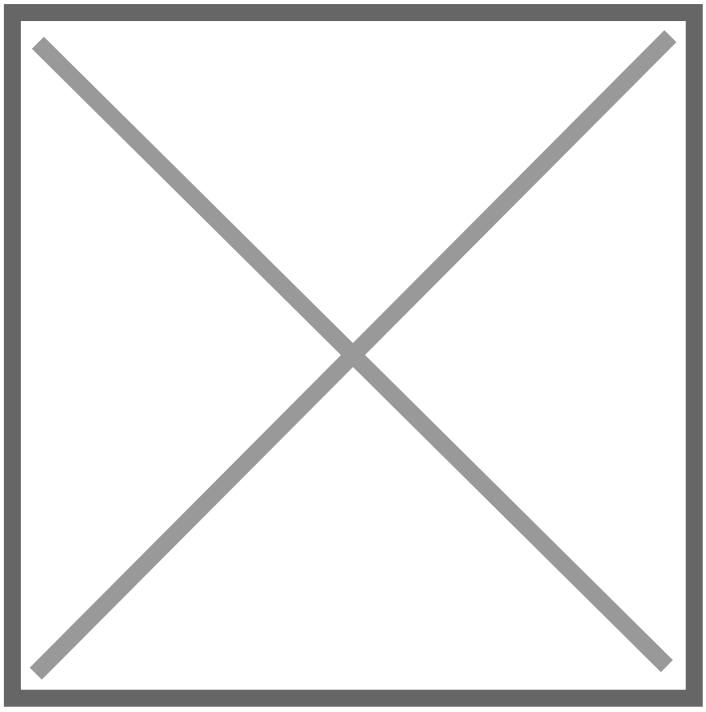
BioSpect
the business of Bi
24 years of leveraging the business of Bio
www.biospectrumindia.co

Get international talent

05 August 2009 | News



Get international talent

Attracting international talent is a useful proposition.

India is still facing shortage of highly motivated scientists with global outlook. There is a huge demand of skilled manpower in research, biomanufacturing and services.

Companies in the bioscience industry have woken up to the reality and have realized that a definite strategy is required to attract international talent to fill in the talent gap that is persisting in the industry. This also means attracting expatriate talent, if the region is to keep up the pace with the leading clusters and companies in the global life science industry. The recognition of India as an emerging bioscience destination have inspired many NRIs to return to India, thereby offering the country benefits of a reverse brain drain. As a large number of multinational companies and organizations find the global Indians an attractive scientific pool, therefore, the return of NRIs from the west is proving immensely fruitful as they are finding multiple avenues in India to explore in terms of job and career.

So the latest question doing the rounds—Is international worth the game? Industry experts say, “Yes, why not.” “The world is becoming flat and a global village. Indian students studying abroad have a different management style and wider perspective of the industry,” elaborates Dr Bhuwnesh Agarwal, chairman and MD, Roche Diagnostics India.

Interestingly, most of the Indian multinationals are seriously considering attracting international talents. Many Indian biotech companies are now repositioning their international talent initiative to attract skilled international manpower. Industry believes that internationalization at workplace creates a feel of different cultures, languages, diverse outlook and understanding. Therefore, the Indian biotech companies are hiring NRIs and foreigners who wish to work in India, and offering them comfort in the local environment. Some of the life science companies which are actively hiring NRIs and foreign nationals are Biocon, Avesthagen, Dr. Reddy’s Laboratories, Ranbaxy and Sami Labs.

Suresh Vazirani, MD of Transasia said, “It would be worthwhile to recruit international students for functions like R&D, quality systems and automation. This would mean exchange of ideas and new perspectives regardless of national boundaries. Having international talent would mean boosting up efforts for indigenous innovation and continuous improvement in related sphere of business activities. Same impact would be on reduction in lead time for delivery and possibly enhancing product life cycle.” He recommends that short-term assignments as consultants with proper compensation should help to attract international talent.

Attracting international talent is a useful proposition for Indian companies as foreign universities provide good educational inputs and are considered to be better aligned with industry requirements. “This can be effectively worked out in companies through exchange programs between domestic universities and foreign counterparts,” said Dr Kashmira Pagdiwalla, director (HR operations), Intas Biopharmaceuticals.

In an effort to attract more talent from abroad, CSIR too plans to attract NRIs to help the country transform into a global life sciences center by offering them housing, health-care allowances as well as other benefits including education for children and residence rights. According to a plan issued by the Indian government, CSIR would be looking at hiring NRIs at some of the key scientific positions in the year ahead. “These key positions are open to NRI scientists and will allow internationally-based scientists to return to India and offer their services. The government also supports the idea of attracting foreign

scientists setting up companies in India," states Dr Samir Brahmachari, director general, CSIR. He believes that if India is to maintain the international talent within the region, we would also need to look out for their families as most of the NRIs these days have a foreign spouse. One way of solving this problem could be by hiring the spouse as well and offering the family a proper residentship. Therefore, a solution to the problem on a political level is needed.

The argument

While most of the CEOs and HR heads support the idea of bringing foreign talent to India towards filling the demand-supply gap, there are few others who have a different opinion. They argue that this is not an ideal solution, but creating and nourishing home-grown talent pool is a better strategy for long term growth. According to them, globalized talent is more important only for companies that do business overseas and not all companies will be able to employ an international talent due to lack of resources. Moreover, foreign employees generally see employment overseas as temporary undertakings, with the aim to return to their homeland after a while.

Thomas Putti, Head HR, Advinus Therapeutics and president, National Human Resource Life Science Forum (NHRLSF), believes it is important that international talent should be brought in—both as faculty in universities to improve the quality of education in India in addition to getting them into industry. Bringing international talent into industry will only help as a short-term measure. Ultimately, long-term sustainability will be achieved only by developing our own talent and building up our people to face global challenges. Apart from attracting global talent in the academia, he recommends that the universities should also look at strategic tie-ups with reputed international universities to enhance the quality and relevance of the courses and bring in improved systems of learning and evaluation.

Giving a balanced opinion, K V Subramaniam, president and CEO, Reliance Life Sciences, said, "The need of the hour is to strengthen the talent pool in India and equip them to deal with the rising challenges posed by a knowledge-driven economy by industries such as biotechnology." He suggests that international talent access can be resorted in specific areas where there are competency deficiencies such as biopharmaceutical manufacturing and licensing.

The retainment issue

Retaining skilled executives and managers seem to become more difficult each year in a global business marketplace. The bioscience organizations too are investing more time, energy and money in attracting and retaining talent than ever before. Therefore, with the idea of attracting international talent, the question of retainment also comes in.

Suggesting ways of bringing back NRI talent back to India and retaining them, Ravi C Dasgupta, group vice-president, HR, Biocon, states, "Attracting and retaining international talent starts from defining talent. External branding and internal branding are two most important ways to attract them. If the company cannot provide similar challenging and fulfilling environment, talent moved in from international companies will get disillusioned."

Suresh Ramu, VP of Data Management, Quintiles India, agrees. He says, "Talent retaining and engagement in clinical research services is different from other industries. In the talent life-cycle, engaging the right person successfully and retaining is a tougher job than hiring the right talent. Though qualifications and experience matter, flexibility to learn on a continuous basis is what a company sees in when hiring international talent."

As the needs of biosciences industry are complex, the need for better adaptation strategies in HR, is required. Niranjan Reddy, executive committee member of NHRLSF states that with huge growth projections for this industry, HR departments are required to play a more strategic role towards gaining international or NRI talents.

Jahanara Parveen
(with inputs from Nayantara Som)