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Q&A

Industry still hiring despite economic woes, recruiter says

If Southern California restaurant operators have slowed down their hiring to save costs, recruiter Brad Metzger hasn't noticed it yet, at least not among the fine-dining operators that are his clients. The workforce is still very transient, moving from job to job, says Metzger, who owns the Santa Monica firm Restaurant Solutions. Working with busy independents who have little time for screening job candidates, he and his associates Sara Christopher, Dick Powell and Julia Kraft place entire management teams or fill individual positions for chefs or managers. Becoming a recruiter was a natural fit for Metzger, who has worked nearly every position in restaurants since landing a job locally as a bread baker and prep cook at Wolfgang Puck's Spago at age 17. While working in restaurants, Metzger was constantly referring potential employees and helping friends find work. Five years ago he hung up his apron and began recruiting full time.



Brad Metzger

Has the slowing economy started to affect the employment scene for independents?

I'm not seeing a lot of changes. Some clients say they've seen their busi-

ness drop a bit, but now it's picked up since the writers' strike ended. Even if a client has seen a drop in business, they still need a manager and are working with us. The biggest problem is people don't take longevity seriously. I don't know if it's an entertainment industry mentality, but people do a lot of jumping around.

What are operators looking for in job candidates?

Stability and longevity, professionalism and maturity. I'm weary of candidates who are only money-driven. What that usually tells me is if they get a position now, in three or four months they will leave for a higher dollar. More important is finding the right fit. Salary is a part of that, but so is the culture, the type of restaurant, its management philosophy, growth opportunities.

Do you miss working in restaurants?

I don't miss my knees aching after eight hours. But we're still in restaurants, we're talking to people, checking in, dining. Sometimes we sit in on staff meetings. Many jokingly consider us their HR department.

— **Dina Berta**