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Game On

HR Games give recruiters a way to find quick-thinking, talented job seekers, while the soon-to-graduate participants hope to gain a competitive edge. HR professionals who act as judges and advisers also find the competitions offer benefits.

By Scott Westcott

Facing an oh-so-ominous job market, would-be HR professionals are turning to games in hopes of gaining a competitive edge.

The HR Games, that is.

While the HR Games have been around for several years, some HR professionals say the competitions are taking on new importance at a time when new college graduates will face stiff competition to land work in the field – and existing pros seek to enhance their network and keep their skills and knowledge up-to-date.

The HR Games are Jeopardy-style competitions in which students planning a career in the field compete against teams from other schools. The questions feature information that will likely appear on the PHR certification exam.

Pat Lynch, president of Business Alignment Strategies in Long Beach, Calif., has volunteered in several capacities at the HR Games.

Lynch says a prime benefit of the competition is the chance to see prospective job candidates facing "on-the-job" type pressure. Students need to make snap decisions, work as a team and show the depth of their knowledge. They can also challenge an answer, revealing their critical thinking skills and ability to express themselves.

"You can see firsthand how they perform under pressure," Lynch says. "Especially [with] today's heightened stress in the workplace, this offers a glimpse at how someone might respond on the job. You have a very short period of time to get it right. It is very stressful situation on a state or national stage. It's a very good indicator how they will react in a similar workplace situation."

In addition, those who participate in the HR Games develop a sense of camaraderie and connection. An HR professional familiar with the Games would likely notice when a candidate includes participation on a resume.

"There is an instant connection," Lynch said. "All things equal, if I had someone in front of me who had been through Games, it would give them an edge over someone who hadn't."

"There are so many benefits to doing this," says Brandon Labman, an HR Games volunteer who is the CEO of Rocs, a job-placement service for college students in the Washington area.

"Students have to stand out even more these days and set themselves apart, and this is a great way to meet and get in front of HR people who make hiring decisions," he says.

Labman is helping to prepare students from several colleges for an upcoming regional HR Games competition. The participating students recognize the need to get involved in professional activities outside the classroom.

"It's a tough market, but it doesn't mean there aren't jobs out there," he says. "You can't sit back and assume an opportunity is just going to come to you. The HR Games can position a student as a marketable candidate."

Refresher Course

Beyond getting to meet some of the best young HR talent, HR professionals who advise, judge or volunteer at the Games benefit from a prime networking opportunity to connect with other colleagues to discuss latest trends, shared challenges and career opportunities.

Nancy Nelson, president of HRProse, an HR consulting and communication firm in Campbell, Calif., has worked with the HR Games as a judge and adviser. She says participation keeps her connected to the latest thinking and trends about HR issues.

"It keeps my skills sharp," says Nelson. "For instance, if you're not working in labor relations, it's a chance to get up-to-date on what is happening in that discipline. Also, you can brush up on some of the HR theory that maybe you haven't been exposed to for a long time."

Many of the competitions are occurring now, with students working their way toward the national competition. The finals are held each year at the annual Society for Human Resource Management conference.

Nelson urges HR professionals to get involved on a local level.

"It's very rewarding to see the new generation of HR professionals, who will be our bosses some day," Nelson says with a laugh. "Everyone benefits from the HR Games."

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