

Green pride

By Dawn Klingensmith
April 10, 2009 Friday

The Phelps Group marketing agency in Santa Monica, Calif., recently "greened up" its building by crowning the roof with the largest commercial solar-panel system in the city. The company also cut back on paper use, switched to nontoxic cleaning products and got serious about recycling, all with longevity in mind -- its own as well as the planet's.

To maintain a competitive edge, "We're constantly on the lookout for talented, creative people, and frankly, many of them are Gen X'ers and Millennials," says Kristen Thomas, who leads the agency's environmental task force.

In her experience, Millennials, also called Generation Y, place a high value on the environmental ethics of prospective employers.

Indeed, recent research suggests that college students and recent graduates prefer to work for companies that take active measures to protect the environment. A survey of 2,774 college students and recent graduates from across the nation found that 81 percent believe it is important to work for a green company, and 79 percent report they would be more likely to join the greener of two companies when comparing similar offers, according to Experience Inc., an Internet-based career services provider.

"Gen Y candidates see working for a green company as one of their top concerns when applying for a job, and employers are taking action," says Jenny Floren, founder and CEO. "Companies are openly touting their green credentials to attract the best and brightest workers."

Case in point: The Phelps Group won over Jason Yoffy, 29, who took a job there as an art director last spring -- but not before he'd done some research to gauge whether the company's values were in line with his own. "The picture of the office on their Web site shows a giant roof full of solar panels. I knew they were serious about the environment when I saw that image," he says.

Though fresh on the scene, young job seekers want to know how companies think about how they do business every day, "not just the half-day employees go out and paint a school," says Rich Leimsider of the Aspen Institute, Washington, D.C., a nonprofit organization that promotes values-based leadership. "Recruiters are telling me over and over again that they're surprised by the questions that are coming up. Companies are being asked about their climate change policies," Leimsider says.

Reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and sustainability through every stage of the supply chain are also being asked about, and candidates expect hard evidence, says Tim Sanders, author of *Saving the World at Work* (Doubleday 2008).

"When companies emphasize being green, they must be very specific about their accomplishments to be credible," he says. "Smart job candidates are spending hours researching potential employers."

Floren says fake or flimsy credentials won't fly.

"Gen Y was brought up in the Internet age and, as a result, they have become extremely savvy when it comes to research," she says. "They are more experienced in determining whether companies are just 'greenwashing' them."