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## **GIVING THE JOBLESS A HAND**

### **SEARCH FIRM MCKINLEY HOSTS FREE CAREER CLINIC**

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Executive search firm McKinley Group got a good turnout at a career clinic Monday from people "in transition" -- the new phrase for joblessness these days. Too bad the company couldn't offer any job opportunities, though it did manage to contribute to a charitable cause: the Minnesota job seeker.

In search of charities to support in 2009, the company decided that one of the neediest groups this year is the jobless. Phones at McKinley are ringing off the hooks, not with calls from their typical clients -- corporations that are hiring -- but from job seekers.

"We're limited as to how much we can do for candidates in this down market," said Kurt Rakos, one of the firm's founding partners.

Since they couldn't offer jobs, they did the next best thing: rounding up a team of job-search experts for the free career clinic on Monday.

The clinic, dubbed "Getting Minnesotans Back to Work," drew close to 200 job seekers to a rotunda at the Carlson Towers in Minnetonka to pick up tips on how to stand out in the sea of candidates. The event featured sessions on resume writing, effectively using Web services like CareerBuilder for job search and LinkedIn for professional networking, as well as tips on interviewing. Attendees found out about the event through job-support groups, networking groups or word of mouth.

Minnetonka-based McKinley, which has seen at least double-digit growth each year since its founding five years ago, went from one of its best quarters -- the fourth quarter of 2008 -- to a January that was its worst month ever; it had to resort to layoffs last week.

For each successful job-candidate placement, client companies pay McKinley a fee equal to about 30 percent of the person's first year salary. "If companies aren't hiring, we're not making money, plain and simple," said Paul Beard, another founding partner.

Like most other companies, McKinley is feeling the pain of a bad economy, albeit somewhat later than others. In January, sales, or job placements, fell 75 percent month over month. "Like a lot of companies, we're trying to figure out where the floor is," Rakos said.

And when companies do call in search of a good candidate, there's a lack of urgency to fill the position. Rakos uses that as an economic barometer.

At the same time, the search firm is receiving a record number of calls from candidates in need of jobs. McKinley works across a wide range of industries, placing experienced workers in sales, marketing, information technology, engineering, accounting and finance jobs.

Even though the firm actually works for corporate clients, not individuals, job seekers call up wanting to be placed. "The amount of calls today is twice what it was six months ago," said Beard.

Geoffrey Smith, 37, heard about the clinic through a job-support group at his church. He said he picked up good tips on how to prepare for interviews. Smith, of Burnsville, was laid off in January from a company he worked at for 4 1/2 years selling heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems to homebuilders. He had managed to avoid three years of layoffs at the company. "There's just no new home construction going on right now," he said.

One session Smith attended was learning how to use LinkedIn for a job search, which he needed. Smith already had set up a profile on the networking site, but he wanted more advice on how to market himself. "I would like to hear from the experts before I publish myself online."

One of his search strategies has been to call on friends and former colleagues. Those people have set him up with housing contractors. No jobs, but they told him about opportunities once the market turns around. Once it does, McKinley hopes that long-term, in a better market, people like Smith would be in hiring positions themselves, and they'd remember the recruiting firm's name.

"What goes around comes around," Rakos said.