Alan Edwards, Senior Director, Americas Product Group - Scientific, Kelly Services, Inc.

To say that the life-science job market is changing would be a drastic understatement. A 2011 White Paper by global workforce solutions company Kelly Services, entitled “The Transformation of the Life Sciences Workforce”, paints a picture of how changes in economics, management and demographics are driving employers to rely more on highly skilled contingent employees. Meanwhile, those same factors are affecting how and why life-science employees seek employment and develop their career paths. During the economic downturn and slow recovery over the past few years, companies watching their bottom lines couldn’t afford to invest as much in what has traditionally been termed full-time or permanent employees. This affected management practices; companies needed to constantly adjust the composition of their employees’ skill sets as projects moved through the pipeline. As for demographics, the workforce has become more mixed; companies must now accommodate three generations of employees — Generation Y, Generation X and Baby Boomers — with varying mobility needs, cultural values and willingness to make long-term commitments.

For both life-science companies and prospective employees, recognizing this new environment is only the first step, says Alan Edwards, Senior Director, Americas Product Group - Scientific, Kelly Services. Kelly Services aims to help highly skilled employees with companies where they can hit the ground running, without additional training or education. Kelly also seeks to help companies adjust to a contingent workforce by finding employees who are more project- and skills-based, so companies can more easily draw from the workforce as projects progress, or disengage them when a project is completed. Edwards tells Nature how Kelly Services can help both jobseekers and companies adapt to these shifts.

Q: What is the new life-science employment reality emerging out of this transformation? Pharma, biotech and other companies that employ scientists want to stay lean, with less overhead tied up in fixed compensation and less cost associated with reducing a workforce. That frees up assets to invest in products that have a shorter development time, either in-house or in an outsourced, risk-shared alliance. As a result, more highly skilled positions are moving to contingent, flexible, contract positions. The workforce is changing into a strategic and transactional marketplace. The old terminology of ‘full-time’ and ‘temporary’ is vanishing.

Q: How can employees better position themselves in this marketplace? A postdoc typically comes in for a job interview and presents a long list of publications. What I, as an employer, want to know is: what skills do you have that will help me advance the work I am doing or achieve my goals faster? By ‘skills’ we mean what specifically have you done that you can bring to a particular project? Also be aware that most employers place an ever-increasing importance on ‘soft’ skills. That is the ability to integrate seamlessly into the culture of the company you are entering. The best thing a life-science jobseeker can do is achieve state of readiness to integrate into the workforce as cost-effectively and productively as possible. The next best thing is to be versatile — or as we say at Kelly, to have ‘versatility™’ — in both skills and functions, and be flexible in your willingness to apply them.

Q: What fields are growing their contingency employment fastest? Clinical research and development, which is naturally project-based, is one of the fastest-growing scientific fields for contingent workers. Both clinical and pre-clinical research and development is being outsourced faster than ever.

Q: What are some of the generational differences in the life-science workforce now? Generation Ys, or ‘Millennials’, want their work to be meaningful and produce meaningful products, and they are willing to compromise on salary to achieve this. They also want the opportunity to work for different companies in different locations. Boomers have witnessed how their parents have handled retirement. They have decided that it is better to be intellectually stimulated and active than to be fully retired — but they still want some time to relax. Boomers can come in, be productive quickly, and are happy to work for a shorter time frame, take a few months off, then maybe find another job somewhere else.

Q: What benefits do you provide employers? We can help a company bring people on board with the skill sets they need to match the technology they have in place, so they do not lose momentum going from one project to the next. A contingent labor pool with ‘versatility’ can adapt to a company’s environment quickly, so business processes can carry on productively and cost-effectively, without interruption. Companies need to hire people and engage them for a period of time and then disengage them as needed. They can do this more efficiently with Kelly. Companies also need an aggregation of talent, and Kelly is the aggregator.

You could be employed full-time by Kelly, but work for various companies. We have thousands of job openings every day.
a world of trust
in a drop of distinction

Trust your workforce to an industry leader
As we emerge from a global recession, our next challenge is to grow our businesses while minimizing fixed costs. Many life sciences companies achieve this balance through a highly skilled contingent workforce of specialized experts who are easily engaged, disengaged, or reassigned for specific processes. A workforce with this kind of versatilability™ will significantly shorten your go-to-market cycle, optimize productivity, and keep expenses under control.

Kelly Scientific Resources® has the kind of flexible workforce solutions you need to enjoy a distinct competitive advantage in today’s workforce transformation. We are the world’s largest scientific staffing company and a respected workforce partner to hundreds of companies around the globe. We understand that access to skilled professionals remains the catalyst of success in all life sciences environments, and with more scientific professionals turning to Kelly® every day, you can trust us to deliver workforce solutions that work for you.

Key areas of specialization:
- Bioprocessing
- Molecular biology
- Cellular biology
- Immunology
- Protein Synthesis
- Clinical Research
- Biochemistry
- QA/QC
- Regulatory affairs

Transform your workforce
Contact any of our global offices. Send us an e-mail or visit our Web site today to find the office nearest you.

E-mail :: scientific@kellyservices.com  ■  Web :: kellyscientific.com

Contract  ■  Contract to hire  ■  Direct hire  ■  Executive search  ■  Project services  ■  Internship management  ■  Business process outsourcing

An Equal Opportunity Employer © 2011 Kelly Services, Inc. W0112