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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Challenger COVID-19 Coverage:

MILLIONS MAY NOW BE IN A JOB SEARCH, AND NEW OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND; TIPS TO LOOK FOR WORK DURING A PANDEMIC

CHICAGO, March 27, 2020 – Yesterday, initial weekly jobless claims soared to 3.3 million. Only a few weeks ago, a historic low of 200,000 people filed in a single week, highlighting the whiplash workers and HR professionals are experiencing as the labor market transitions from one of the tightest on record to a likely recession. Despite the current crisis, numerous companies are actively hiring nationwide to keep up with exploding demand, according to research from global outplacement and business and executive coaching firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

“The outbreak of COVID-19 has caused unprecedented impact to the economy and labor market. Millions of people, many of whom previously worked primarily in Leisure and Hospitality, have found themselves without work. However, retailers, medical device makers, consumer products manufacturers, and transportation and warehousing facilities are all thriving right now. There are opportunities for those recently laid off,” said Andrew Challenger, Senior VP of Challenger, Gray & Christmas, Inc.

Challenger has tracked 129,000 hiring announcements from individual companies so far in March, mainly from grocery stores and retailers who are racing to keep up with demand. In addition to retailers, Pepsi is hiring 6,000 people, and Domino’s is hiring 1,000 new delivery drivers. Meanwhile, GE and 3M, which manufacture much-needed health care products, are ramping up production and will likely need to increase shifts and workers.

“Companies are definitely still hiring right now. The methods may be a bit unusual, as companies are prioritizing speed during the hiring process,” said Challenger.

Companies that are hiring now are reportedly having workers start immediately, before drug screenings and background checks clear. Many are having applicants apply by text message and hiring workers without meeting them in-person.

“This could be a great opportunity for those who were having trouble finding work before the outbreak, perhaps due to a criminal record or other potential infraction that was keeping them from getting hired, to get their foot in the door. Once you are on the job and proving that you can do the work, it’s less likely you’ll be removed.

“Obviously, discrimination in hiring is always bad for businesses and the economy overall. When companies are hiring so quickly, discrimination by age, sex, or race may not be as much of a factor, since they are so in need of capable people,” said Challenger.

The speed with which companies need to hire is also changing the interviewing and onboarding process. According to new Challenger survey, 48% of companies are actively hiring right now. Of those that are hiring, 79% are doing so in web and phone interviews. Only 16% reported they were conducting interviews in person. Of the 56% of companies that are onboarding, 67% are conducting video sessions.

The survey was conducted online among 200 companies nationwide between March 20, 2020 and March 26, 2020.

In light of these rapid changes, Challenger offered the following tips for job seekers:

Networking is still possible during a pandemic. No, you cannot meet your contacts for coffee or lunch, but you can set up 30 minute phone calls and video sessions. Now is also a great time to start building relationships with recruiters or others employed in your field for when job openings appear. Almost everyone is stuck inside right now, so take advantage of that time.

Apply, apply, apply. Companies need workers now, so shore up your resume highlighting your key accomplishments and contributions to the organizations with which you have worked, and start applying.

Familiarize yourself with video conferencing tools. Zoom and Skype are emerging as the most popular apps for holding video interviews, but there are others, as well. Some companies conduct interviews over Facetime or Google’s Duo. Download this software to your computer or phone and practice having calls with family and friends.

Choose a well-lit, quiet spot with a neutral background to have video conferences. When a potential employer or networking contact calls, make sure you are not in so dark a place that the he or she cannot see you. Make sure to remove any potentially offensive materials in the

background or within the shot, like containers of alcohol. Try to choose a tidy spot that does not have too much clutter.

Use your interviewer's or contact's name to show you are engaged. Eye contact is key during in-person meetings. However, during a video conference, it is best practice to keep your eyes straight ahead on the camera. Since you cannot make direct eye contact, try to use the interviewer's name throughout the process. This is particularly helpful if the video interview is with a panel of multiple interviewers. Use each individual's name as you are answering specific questions.

Stay positive. Challenger always emphasizes this aspect of the job search, as employers generally connect and want to hire happy workers, but now it is particularly important. Job searching is difficult enough without the added anxiety of a pandemic. Lean on family and friends, even if not physically. Call friends often, take a virtual class, or start up a group text thread. If you are having trouble finding something, know that this situation is temporary and jobs will come back eventually. We are all in this together.

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To arrange an interview with Andrew Challenger, Vice President of Challenger, Gray & Christmas, or view the list of company actions, please contact Colleen Madden Blumenfeld.