

Getting and Keeping Quality Employees

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A normal complaint by employers that my firm works with is that they cannot find new employees with the qualifications needed or keep their current employees. This is an issue facing most industries. There are a number of factors for it including the following:

- **Societal.** There are not as many entry level employees available as there was a couple decades ago because the birth rate has been down worldwide for many years. In the United States, this shortage can be attributed in part to many women entering into careers and either foregoing motherhood or delaying it until later in life and having fewer children. The result is that organizations are now getting very creative in searching other non-traditional talent pools (e.g. retirees) as well as providing customized benefit packages to attract potential employees.
- **Technological.** People do not have the requisite knowledge and skills for many highly automated jobs. This shortage may be contributed to by the fast pace of technological innovation making knowledge and skills obsolete unless people take the time to learn the changes or stay current. It may also be caused by a percentage of workers who are intimidated by technology and avoid it. Additionally, because of the rapid change, organizations are now required to make larger investments in technology which often takes away from dollars traditionally used for hiring and training staff members.
- **Cultural.** Each organization has its own culture based on the values and beliefs of management and employees, customer needs and wants, shareholder demands, and the environment in which it competes for market share or to provide services. Finding the right people to fit into the organizational culture is crucial for the success of the group and the individual employees. A mismatch can send cascading ripples on to customers or throughout the work unit because of breakdowns in service and interpersonal relationships on a number of levels. With fewer entry level employees to choose from, many organizations struggle to find just the right people to add to the employee base.
- **Managerial.** One of the biggest complaints by incumbent employees is that their managers fail to effectively coach them, provide feedback, recognize their contributions, or provide ongoing opportunities for personal and professional growth. These factors are significant in the mind of many workers. When managers fail to get to know their staff members on an interpersonal level and to practice sound supervisory skills (e.g. coaching, mentoring, and constructive feedback), employees often become disenchanted and start looking to go where they are better cared for in their mind.

So how does an organization successful staff itself and keep the talent needed to provide quality customer service and compete in a global environment? In three words - plan, train and execute.

- **Benchmark Successful Practices.** It is not only foolish to fail to look at the best practice of industry leaders; it is also a waste of time and money. Why reinvent

the wheel when other organizations may have already spent the time and money doing the research for you. Tap into internet research on recruiting employees, look for white papers on the topics, and buy reports created from studies done by professional organizations that focus on staffing and recruiting (e.g. SHRM). Read professional journals and magazines pertinent to the fields for which you are staffing, and spend time networking with others in the industry by attending local professional meetings or attending national conferences. If no local benchmarking exists, suggest to other HR or management professionals in neighboring companies that a committee be formed to conduct a study that all participants will benefit from. While you may be later competing against some of these companies for talent, you may also find that some of their employees will migrate to your organization. It is up to your management team to create a desirable, professional environment that will attract such employees.

- **Plan.** Effective human resource departments use a multi-pronged approach to recruiting. This is done in coordination with department managers to ensure that the right people are being sought. Periodic reevaluation of job tasks and job descriptions is crucial. This is where the departmental staff comes into play. They should make sure that any requirements that are being advertised for the job are up to date and realistic.

Once the correct criterion has been identified, it is time to start the search. In addition to the traditional newspaper advertising, successful HR professionals tap into many other resources. Some of these include employee referrals, college recruiting, online job boards, and local business after hour events sponsored by professional groups catering to their desired candidate market. Groups such as SHRM, ASTD, ICSA, Toastmasters, and groups specific to career fields applicable to the organizations business lines (e.g. accountants, nurses, marketing professionals and traditional blue color worker groups) are also fruitful hunting grounds. Other potential bonanza areas are military bases, retiree and senior groups and communities, ethnic community groups, chambers of commerce, junior achievement and high school business programs (e.g. Distributive Education Club of America [DECA]). Successful HR staffing initiatives also advertising in multiple languages (e.g. Hispanic, Vietnamese, or Chinese) in communities where large ethnic groups reside. Non-traditional advertising sources often pay dividends too – bumper stickers, handouts posted on Laundromat, bowling alley, and supermarket bulletin boards, local news and advertising publications, coupon packs sent to homeowners, homeowner association newsletters, high school graduation programs and newsletters, or theatre screens. The key is to exhaust all avenues and then look for new ones in an effort to get the word out about your organization and find the people you need to be successful.

- **Train.** Once on board, employees need initial and ongoing training to provide the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful. One of the biggest mistakes that many organizations make is to either forego new hire orientation, rely

exclusively on technology to deliver the information, or to entrust the introduction to the organization to the wrong people (e.g. an untrained peer or an outgoing incumbent). In the latter instance, these people have nothing to lose by sharing shortcuts or ways to get around policy and procedure or to set up negative impressions in the mind of the new employee. An orientation should always be positive, personal and upbeat. Get employees involved, incorporate activity, networking, games, and even prizes into the session to make the person feel welcome and get them off to a positive start. Supervisors should definitely be personally involved in the orientation process. They should spend time talking about their management style, expectations and going over what the person needs to do to be successful. Explaining the performance appraisal process via sharing of the actual form used for that evaluation is helpful because new employees can then ask questions early on about how they can succeed in the eyes of the supervisor and organization. This is actually the beginning of the ongoing coaching process that every supervisor and manager should have in place and practice with all employees. There are many good books on new hire orientation on the market. One resource to help employees off to a good start is *Job Strategies for New Employees* available at www.presentationresources.net.

Once new hires are on the job, a plan should be developed to provide ongoing job knowledge, and skill training for them. This should be incorporated into a personal growth plan as part of their performance appraisal when personal and professional performance goals are set. The key is to monitor work performance and make sure that training that will actually supplement current knowledge and skills or teach new ones are offered.

There is no one easy answer to the question of how to get and retain quality people. The key is an ongoing creative approach to recruiting and training employees while providing a positive professional environment in which they feel comfortable and can flourish.

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