

SPECIAL REPORT
A supplement to BLR publications

Best Practices In Recruitment And Retention

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Best Practices In Recruitment And Retention

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Introduction

Of all the varied responsibilities in human resources, two of the most critical are recruiting the best employees and keeping them happy and on the job. The selection of employees is vital to the success of any business because hiring decisions have a lasting effect on morale, productivity—and profitability.

Whether a human resources department uses the term “human capital management” in describing its efforts to elicit the best work from satisfied, productive staff, or “talent management” to describe this process, it is in the best interests of any organization to expend resources on employee retention and commitment to the organization.

Even when you do recruit the right candidates, your company’s organization, culture, and benefits must be successfully managed to retain these workers and maintain a return on investment in their training and development.

Unfortunately, there’s a tendency in the current economic climate for some corporations to focus more on measuring employee performance rather than on measuring the success of employee-retention efforts.

You’ve read articles with tips on how to advertise and promote your job openings and the best interviewing techniques. You’ve attended seminars and listened to audioconferences about benefits packages and retention programs.

However, what you really want to know is how real-life HR professionals—in actual companies— handle recruitment and retention issues. What methods have they developed that you could adapt to fit your company’s particular needs?

Here’s a short checklist of some old and new perks that many companies report work very well for them:

- ◆ Outside conferences and seminars
- ◆ Tuition reimbursement
- ◆ Managerial training
- ◆ Bonuses
- ◆ Holiday gifts
- ◆ Achievement awards
- ◆ Flextime
- ◆ Athletic facilities
- ◆ Discount programs
- ◆ Interesting and important work assignments
- ◆ Independence to make decisions
- ◆ Banking services such as free checking accounts, higher savings account interest rates, and discounts on loans and credit cards with the company’s banking partner

- ◆ Pets at work
- ◆ Discounts on merchandise (especially computers and other high-tech equipment)
- ◆ On-site/Web access to discounted personal services such as dry cleaning, photo finishing, prepared meals for home, etc.
- ◆ On-site child care
- ◆ Dependent care assistance
- ◆ Adoption assistance
- ◆ Charitable donation matches
- ◆ Employer-provided services
- ◆ Leaves
- ◆ Parking privileges
- ◆ Payroll deduction plans to purchase group life, auto, or homeowners' insurance
- ◆ Sick pay
- ◆ Transportation benefits
- ◆ Vacation pay and additional vacation

But there are many more, and in this special report you will discover, through actual case studies, how leading companies, large and small, are developing and improving their own HR practices in order to hire the best candidates and keep them. We hope that these best practices may give you ideas that you can implement in your own company.

*Do you have a “best practice” of your own
that you would like to share?*

*Contact Elaine Quayle, associate editor, at
equayle@blr.com.*

Texas Instruments

Secrets to Recruiting Success

Measuring the results of recruiting efforts is the best way to determine the success of a recruiting program, says Steve Lyle, director of worldwide staffing for Texas Instruments (TI). Not only does the company track traditional measures, such as hiring cycle time and cost-to-hire, to ensure productivity, it also uses a quality-of-hire metric to determine whether it's getting the right talent for the right job.

Four months after an employee is hired at TI (<http://www.ti.com>), his or her manager is asked to rate the employee (as part of a survey) on whether the person is "meeting," "not meeting," or "exceeding" the manager's expectations of him or her. Currently, TI managers report that 97 percent of their new hires are exceeding expectations, Lyle reports. New employees are also surveyed to see if the job they are performing is what they had expected. "We know our strategy is working," based on the feedback from both surveys, Lyle explains. "It's a matter of staying the course and continually improving."

TI's Recruiting Strategy

The company's current recruiting strategy started evolving in 2000, when its CEO at the time, as well as members of his strategic leadership team, created six "talent doctrines" as guiding principles for TI leaders to use as a means to excel in the areas of hiring, developing, managing, and retaining talent. The staffing organization was charged with bringing the hiring doctrine, called "Get the Best," to life and ensuring that TI was indeed recruiting the best candidates.

After extensive research and planning, Lyle says the staffing organization identified five major processes for its recruiting strategy:

1. **People planning.** HR partners with Finance at a business-group level to evaluate how many and what types of positions will need to be filled in a given time frame (typically four quarters out) and also to ensure that the business group's financial plan will support its hiring plan.
2. **Developing performance profiles.** Lyle describes these as "fairly extensive versions of job descriptions." The focus of the profiles is not just on what the job entails, but also on what needs to be accomplished by a person in that position and what the job expectations are.
3. **Centralized sourcing.** An HR team at TI's Dallas headquarters is constantly on the lookout for new talent. The team partners with search firms "to keep the talent pipeline moving," Lyle says. TI also relies heavily on its employee referral program, and it pays a cash incentive to employees upon hire of their referrals. Employees refer approximately 50 percent of new hires. "It's definitely proven to be cost effective," Lyle says. "More importantly, the quality of hires is pretty sound. Our involuntary turnover of these individuals is very low."

4. **Business-specific recruiting.** TI has recruiters dedicated to each of its major businesses in the United States. These recruiters work directly with hiring managers to land desirable candidates.
5. **Assessment and selection.** The company uses team-based interviews to select the best job candidates. Interviewers ask both behavioral questions (i.e., how the candidate would approach something from an interpersonal communications perspective) and technical questions (i.e., how he or she would solve a technology or process issue).

TI's recruiting strategy has been rolled out worldwide. However, the five processes vary somewhat in the company's non-U.S. locations. For example, some non-U.S. locations do not have employees dedicated to recruiting and staffing. Instead, HR managers or generalists take on those responsibilities.

The company's recruiting efforts were recently recognized by the International Quality & Productivity Center, which named TI a finalist for a "Recruiting & Staffing Best in Class" award.

Tips to Follow

Lyle offers the following tips to employers that want to strengthen their recruiting strategies:

- ◆ **Stay the course.** Companies make a mistake by trying to reinvent the wheel every year or every other year. Even though TI has not implemented every recruiting process in all non-U.S. locations, it has been persistent. "We don't give up because we don't have all organizations following the same procedure. We don't change the entire direction because the metrics did not improve dramatically in a 12-month period. We look at continuous improvement and bottom-line results."
- ◆ **Get help.** If you don't believe in your strategy because you are not seeing results, form a cross-functional team and/or bring in an expert to assist in the development of a new strategy.
- ◆ **Put measurements in place.** If you want improvement, if you want results, then you need to measure. That's the only way you know you're on the right course.

IKEA

Recruiting in Volume: Preparing for A New Store Opening

As IKEA Home Furnishings (www.ikea-usa.com) prepared to open its 200th store, it relied on two recruiting methods that had already proven successful for the company in other cities: job fairs and an online job application process.

During the several months preceding the New Haven, Connecticut, store opening, IKEA received 1,200 résumés via job fairs and its online application process for 350 positions available at the store, says Alicia Nuñez, human resources manager in New Haven.

Job Fairs

With more than 200 stores in 32 countries (including 20 U.S. stores), IKEA has extensive recruiting experience. Job fairs serve a dual purpose for the company. First, they provide access to a large pool of job applicants. Second, they offer the company a way to promote itself in the community, says Nuñez. For example, some people attending a job fair may not be interested in a job at IKEA, but they might be interested in shopping there.

In anticipation of the July 2004 store opening in New Haven, IKEA held its own job fair and participated in several area job fairs sponsored by other organizations. The company discussed job opportunities available at the store with potential applicants, as well as its comprehensive benefits package. Those who didn't submit résumés at the job fairs were encouraged to do so via IKEA's website.

Online Applications

In addition to touting the online job application process at job fairs, the company took advantage of every opportunity to promote the process. For example, the company:

- ◆ Included the website on its signage on the store building
- ◆ Promoted the site to career services at local colleges
- ◆ Advertised the site in a local daily newspaper

Nuñez says having applicants submit their résumés electronically is beneficial for both the company and for job applicants. The process has helped IKEA make its recruiting efforts more efficient. Although the company still accepts résumés through postal mail and from walk-ins, managers don't have to spend as much time sorting through paper résumés.

Instead, in partnership with HR, managers are trained to use an online skill search to find résumés that match job openings in their departments. Before the New Haven store opened, managers identified which applicants would be good matches and then called those applicants for in-person interviews, Nuñez says. The same approach will be used with ongoing recruiting efforts.

Job applicants can search the online job listings by location and type and then "nominate" themselves for open positions. IKEA's website offers a user-friendly tool to help applicants "build" their résumés.

This not only ensures that all of the necessary information is included on a résumé, but it also enables applicants to present their information in a fair and consistent way, says Nuñez.

"The process allows us to be consistent and fair in our hiring process," she says, noting that this helps the company focus on applicants' skills rather than on fancy fonts or paper used in creating other résumés.

Lessons Learned

Nuñez offers the following advice to companies that need to recruit a large number of employees for the opening of a new store:

- ◆ **Prepare in advance as much as possible.** IKEA stores generally start recruiting about 1 year in advance of a new store opening.
- ◆ **Take advantage of local resources.** Before opening the New Haven store, IKEA developed partnerships with local colleges, job developers, and the Connecticut Department of Labor.
- ◆ **Be creative.** Before IKEA opened a store in Bloomington, Minnesota, this summer, its recruiting efforts included a “Meet You in Your Neighborhood” program. Qualified job applicants who had submitted their résumés electronically could arrange an in-person interview with an IKEA job recruiter at a convenient location, such as a library or a coffee shop.
- ◆ **Create an environment where people want to work.** Each IKEA staff member is called a “co-worker” no matter what his or her level is, because each is a valuable part of the IKEA team.
- ◆ **Offer a comprehensive benefits package and promote it.** In addition to health benefits for full- and part-time workers and domestic partners, IKEA offers paid maternity/paternity leave, tuition reimbursement, a 401(k) matching plan, flexible work arrangements, lactation rooms, and extensive professional development and training programs.

IKEA was named in *Working Mother* magazine’s “100 Best Companies for Working Mothers” and *Training* magazine’s “Top 100” companies that excel in professional development and training programs.

Boston College Dining Services

Creative Recruitment Ideas Breed Success

Boston College (BC) Dining Services Human Resources Manager Beth Burns has consistently demonstrated her creativity in developing a strong, stable workforce to feed BC’s students, faculty, and visitors. BC Dining Services (<http://www.bc.edu/offices/bcnds>) has a staff of 55 managers, 215 full-time staff, and more than 800 part-time employees serving 22,000 meals a day. At present, there are only 3 open staff positions within the Dining Services division while in 1999, there was an average of 23 open positions at any given time. Historically, there have always been a few open management positions as well, but now Burns is happy to report that they haven’t had a management position open since June 2003.

Having already been a manager at BC Dining Services, when Burns was promoted into her HR position in 1999, she made employee recruitment her major focus in her new role. “At the time, the [restaurant and food service] industry was in a boom period, and we had difficulties filling the jobs,” she explains. Classified

advertising in newspapers was expensive and not always fruitful in attracting job applicants, so Burns began to use additional avenues to seek employees.

Reaching Out to Area Students

One recruitment method that Burns initiated made BC Dining Services more visible to the surrounding communities. Burns contacted vocational schools, specifically in the Boston area. "I visited their culinary arts programs and was a guest speaker in their classes," she notes. Burns fostered the relationship further by inviting the schools' students to BC. "This networking effort blossomed into a strong link with public education," she emphasizes.

Approximately 50 students visit BC during each of six field trips for tours, presentations by Dining Services management staff, and lunch. Burns says, "We discuss culinary and other practical topics such as résumé building."

Each spring before the Boston area high schools end their school year, Burns sends fliers to guidance counselors that advertise part-time, after-school and weekend job openings for the following September-to-May college year at BC. Interested students are invited to participate in an interview process. About 150 students are chosen for employment; then they are invited to attend a paid, half day of meetings to discuss customer service, food handling, and other responsibilities. That same day, students receive their work assignments, as well as their Dining Services polo shirt and hat. These activities take place during July and August so that the students are ready to work in September.

Rounding Out the Staff with Retirees

To recruit retirees, Burns focuses on community centers located at each public senior-citizen housing location within the city. Burns' advertising at the centers, usually through flyers, has rewarded BC Dining Services with a cadre of warm, hardworking employees. The students and other staff learn a great deal from the retirees, many who have already had successful careers (such as one former certified public accountant) but just aren't ready to be completely retired, Burns adds.

In fact, retirees in the Dining Service workforce have been so successful that BC recently changed some temporary part-time positions into 18 new, permanent, 30-hours-per-week, September-to-May positions, enabling retirees to become eligible for vacation and sick time.

Other Innovative Ideas

For general employment recruitment, Burns explains that she relies on online recruitment through job boards and ValPak (<http://www.valpak.com>), an envelope of direct-mail coupons that is distributed to homes in specific areas. Burns and her staff designed a coupon-style ad that provides an explanation of BC workplace benefits and contact information. She notes that the cost is significantly lower than even a one-time presence in a standard employment newspaper ad, and the coupons are often saved by consumers, resulting in job applications over a longer period of time.

The Campus School, an educational and skill-development program for the developmentally and physically handicapped, which is part of the BC School of Education, also provides the Dining Services with 16 employees along with their job coaches. Burns explains that “the job coaches provide the employees with specialized instructions and coaching support and act as liaison to the management team.” She is quick to point out that these employees are treated as regular employees and are invited to employee events and all employee-training sessions. She says, “They’re part of the culture and part of the team.”

The Campus School employees, along with the retirees, round out the diverse workforce, providing employment opportunities for individuals who might not have been able to secure positions on their own, and providing staffing for positions that might otherwise be difficult to fill.

Burns notes that the new recruitment methods developed during the past 5 years have prepared BC for the predicted upturn in the economy and expected increase in demand for workers in their industry. Using nontraditional avenues of employment recruitment can result in a strong, diverse team of employees, support the local community by increasing employment options, and assist high school students in learning more about different career paths.

Steelscape

Team-Based Hiring Approach Minimizes Turnover

When Steelscape, Inc., has an opening at one of its manufacturing facilities, the company doesn’t rely on a supervisor to hire someone with the necessary technical skills. Instead, it depends on a team of employees to determine which candidate is the best fit for the organization and for the team on which he or she would work.

The Kalama, Washington-based company, which produces steel coils for the construction market, operates 24/7. It depends on a self-directed workforce to keep production flowing, says Bill Freemel, vice president of human resources and organizational development for Steelscape (www.steelscape.com). Ensuring that team members work well together is particularly important during the night shift. “There are no supervisors on the floor at night,” says Freemel. “The associates run the lines.”

Freemel credits the company’s team-based hiring process with significantly reducing turnover and boosting productivity. The company boasts a 1.6 percent turnover rate for employees who stay past 6 months. “People come to work for us, and they want to stay,” he says. Although Steelscape’s hiring approach is not inexpensive, the company saves money in the long run because turnover is so low. In addition, productivity is high because the teams work well together, and employees gain a sense of business ownership through their involvement in the hiring process, he says.

The company’s hiring efforts were recently recognized by the American Psychological Association, which awarded Steelscape a “best practices” award.

How It Works

Steelscape doesn't wait until it has an opening to look for qualified candidates. Instead, the company strives to have a pool of up to 10 candidates at any one time, Freemel says. In order to build that pool, the company periodically advertises in a local newspaper, encouraging qualified candidates to apply for a job at Steelscape through WorkSource, a Washington state government resource that helps get the unemployed back to work.

Applicants take a preemployment screening test that assesses their skills. The test costs about \$40, but Steelscape foots the bill for people who couldn't otherwise afford the fee, says Freemel. Also, if applicants pay to take the test and are later hired, the company reimburses them.

Each applicant who passes the test is invited to participate in a "pre-orientation" about Steelscape and is called for an interview. The interview is conducted by up to six manufacturing associates who have received training on the types of questions they can and can't ask during interviews, how to listen to candidates and take good notes, and what they need to know about an applicant to make a hiring decision, says Freemel. An HR representative attends every interview, but the associates are in charge.

After spending 30 to 45 minutes interviewing a candidate, the associates hold a debriefing to rank the candidate against other applicants and decide which candidates would be a good fit for the organization. The top four candidates are called back for a second interview. At that time, a team of up to six associates assesses those people for team compatibility before deciding who should be hired.

The process is very efficient, Freemel says, noting that it takes only about 2 weeks to complete the hiring process, including mandatory background checks, drug screening, and a physical for any applicant who is offered a job.

What to Do

Freemel offers the following tips to employers who want to adopt a team-based hiring process:

- ◆ **Create a team culture.** "You've got to have a culture that values a team-based organization. You can't just say it; you have to really mean it," he says.
- ◆ **Do the upfront work.** "Take your time and do it right—whatever process you follow—because it's hard to get rid of a bad employee," he says. Freemel compares the hiring process to painting a house. If you just start painting without taking the time to tape the trim and to put down tarps, you'll end up with a mess. But if you do the prep work, "cleanup's a breeze or there isn't any cleanup," he says.
- ◆ **Find a good preemployment screening tool.** When Freemel started working at Steelscape 4 years ago, he wasn't pleased with the preemployment screening tool that the company had been using, so he found another one.

- ◆ **Provide training.** Employees who participate in the interview process need to be trained so that they understand their goals and their legal responsibilities during interviews.
- ◆ **Be flexible.** Adapt your hiring process as needed. Freelmer refers to Steelscape's hiring process as an "evolving" one.

American City Business Journals

Structured Interviews Help Employers Make Smarter Hiring Decisions

Finding, attracting, and retaining quality talent is an ongoing challenge for most organizations. As the economy improves, the task is likely to get more difficult because more employees are starting to seek new job and career opportunities. However, as the talent pool expands, and you have 50 candidates applying for a job, how do you select the right person?

Tom Wood, vice president/group publisher for American City Business Journals (ACBJ) says, "We have found that a professional screening tool to assess job candidates in the selection process is right more than 80 percent of the time." Wood oversees the company's human resources functions.

ACBJ (<http://www.bizjournals.com>) is the largest publisher of local business news covering 41 locations across the country. It also publishes several sports publications as well as *Hemming Motor News*. Finding the right talent to fill a variety of positions from advertising sales representatives to news management for this fast-growing organization has been a time-consuming and challenging task. Wood says, "The task is more complicated because our recruiting and hiring process is very decentralized, and each manager is responsible for his or her own recruiting and hiring."

In an effort to improve the quality and quantity of candidates applying for a position and find a better way to evaluate them, ACBJ turned to Kenexa, an HR services provider, to help them meet its objectives. Kenexa responded by providing a suite of talent management solutions and applications for talent acquisition and performance management.

"Among other things, Kenexa designed an interview tool exclusively for ACBJ that helps equip our managers to make smarter hiring decisions," said Wood. The interview tool is a customized version of the Kenexa Insight™ interview approach. The interview questions are linked to job performance criteria. The process includes a structured telephone interview conducted by Kenexa's professional interviewers. Depending on how questions are answered, these analysts are able to provide an

objective indicator of what types of innate talents or traits a person may have. The resulting report provides information that helps managers identify who would be most productive in a given position and which candidates will mesh best within the company's existing culture.

According to Wood, in-depth selection interviews can more accurately predict who would perform best in any given position. "For example, a candidate may be better for a display advertising position than a classified advertising sales position," explained Wood. "What a person brings to the table in terms of his or her own talent helps him or her to be successful in one position where they may not be in another. Everyone has a certain degree of talent, and this process helps us identify what those talents are." In addition, Kenexa provides counsel on how to help a person be more successful by focusing on stronger traits and managing around lesser traits.

ACBJ has found that the people they hired who were predicted to be good have been good, and the ones predicted to be not so good weren't. "Since we started doing in-depth interviews, we have been better at identifying stronger people," Wood explains. For example, salespeople who came through the interview with high performance scores and were hired generated higher levels of sales more quickly than individuals who didn't perform as well during the interview. Sales representatives who were rated as top candidates by the interview averaged \$250,000 more in sales per year.

A longtime believer in using in-depth interviews to screen prospective employees, Wood advises others to use their instincts to complement the screening results. "We caution our managers not to rely solely on that interview," he notes. "They have to hire people they like, people they feel comfortable with. But this interview report will give them a better understanding than what they can gain themselves in how successful a candidate may be on a particular job.

"We have been a fast growing company and part of that success can be attributed to the fact that we hire good, strongly talented people and have continued to improve our organization that way. The Kenexa Insight interview is another tool in our selection process that helps our managers identify the most talented people out there, to recruit them, and get them into the company."

If you'd like to learn more about the Kenexa Insight interview approach and other screening and recruiting tools, visit Kenexa's website at <http://www.kenexa.com>. The site includes several demonstration programs that illustrate how the tools work.

Military Personnel Another Tool in The Home Depot's Hiring Strategy

Military personnel are drilled to understand the importance of teamwork, discipline, and leadership, and their training and experience provide a valuable foundation for a career after their military service has ended, says Bob Ravener, vice president of human resources for The Home Depot, Inc. That's why the home improvement retail giant recently launched a new hiring initiative with three federal agencies aimed at tapping into that pool of military talent.

The Home Depot has joined forces with the U.S. Departments of Labor, Defense, and Veterans Affairs to introduce Operation Career Front, a program in which the departments link members of the military community with career opportunities at The Home Depot.

The company has a proven track record with such national initiatives, as well as with hiring veterans:

- ◆ The Home Depot has hired several thousand people through a hiring initiative it launched with the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) in June 2002.
- ◆ In 2003, the company hired 10,000 veterans and more than 12,000 veterans in 2004.

A Natural Fit

With more than 100,000 jobs to fill every year, the company needs many tools in its hiring belt. "We have a constant need for top talent," says Ravener.

Since more than 200,000 people separate from military service every year, and 12 million veterans are in the workforce, the military community is a valuable source of talent for The Home Depot, says Ravener, a Navy veteran and member of the President's National Hire Veterans Committee. The training military personnel receive, their level of commitment, and common values between the military and The Home Depot make veterans a "great, natural fit" for the company, he says. "People coming out of the military are some of the best people we have in the workforce. The training, development, and attributes that are honed while in uniform have served the company well."

In addition, Ravener says there are over 450,000 spouses of active military personnel in the workforce. Operation Career Front targets those spouses, too, as well as National Guard members and reservists.

How It Works

After discussing their respective needs and strengths, The Home Depot and the federal agencies collaborated to create Operation Career Front. Here's how it works.

The U.S. Department of Defense provides a link on its website to an Operation Career Front website (<http://careers.homedepot.com/military>). The Defense Department also lists The Home Depot as a prospective employer on its job search website and makes information available to interested military personnel and their families, outlining the process to apply for careers with The Home Depot through its Military Transition Assistance and Family Centers. In addition, the Marine for Life program promotes Operation Career Front to Marines in transition, as well as Marines who have previously served, through its nationwide network of alumni hometown links.

DOL provides Operation Career Front information to its more than 2,000 One-Stop Career Centers throughout the country and via local veterans' employment representatives and Disabled Veteran Opportunity Program specialists located at One-Stops and Transition Centers. In addition, the Veterans Affairs Department's Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment division makes Operation Career Front information available to veterans with service-connected disabilities through its representatives in state offices.

What to Do

Although many companies don't operate on a national scale like The Home Depot, smaller companies can still benefit from recruiting those in the military community and from other hiring initiatives with state and federal agencies. Here are a few tips from Ravener to get started:

- ◆ **Reach out to the government and the military.** "Don't hesitate to make contact with the agencies or the military bases," he says. "They are really in the business of helping individuals land jobs and worked very openly to help us."
- ◆ **Find additional resources.** "Tap all avenues and into all organizations that exist for helping people get jobs," he says. For example, The Home Depot also formed a hiring partnership with the AARP in February 2004.
- ◆ **Create a team that makes the initiative a priority.** "You need good people on the task. Make sure it's being managed as a priority and by people who can see it to a successful conclusion," Ravener says.
- ◆ **Be persistent but patient.** Operation Career Front was in the works for about a year before it was launched. "You have to have the stamina to stick with it. Don't get discouraged," he says.

Household Finance

Applicant Tracking System Lets Managers Focus on Hiring Decisions, Not Paperwork

Aggressive growth plans and mountains of résumés created a formidable workforce management and development challenge for Household Finance until it reengineered its recruiting process.

Recruiting Challenges

Household (a member of the HSBCG Group) serves customers in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada with various loan products, including real estate secured and personal unsecured loans, auto loans, and private label and general-purpose credit cards. In the past, the company's recruiting process was decentralized. Trying to properly support over 1,600 branches and support facilities with a paper-based, manual recruitment process was inefficient, expensive, and an overwhelming challenge.

Jeanne Gruner, vice president of human resources, recalls: "We couldn't even share résumés among business groups, so our recruiters couldn't effectively search for qualified candidates that weren't the right fit for one location, but might have been perfect for another opening elsewhere in the organization. We needed a recruiting solution that could reduce the time to fill a job and our cost per hire."

Gruner was asked to seek a proven and stable solution that could be embraced by the entire company as well as external prospects. She and Scott Johnson, human resources project manager, teamed up to understand the needs, goals, and concerns related to developing and maintaining a recruiting process that would support the company's staffing and business plans.

They concluded that the right application would need to be a customizable, Web-based applicant tracking system (ATS) to streamline the recruitment workflow and create an automated business process. However, a canned approach wouldn't do. The ATS would have to:

- ◆ Integrate with Household's existing PeopleSoft system
- ◆ Be flexible enough to provide detailed hiring metric reports for senior management
- ◆ Maintain the company's existing application format, yet allow jobseekers to perform job searches and other career-oriented activities
- ◆ Be easily accessed from remote locations without the need for client-side software or time-consuming downloads

Gruner says: "Once we had a clear understanding of the challenges, we needed to find a vendor we could partner with to achieve our objectives. A request for proposal was sent to potential vendors. After all the responses were reviewed, references checked, and the due diligence completed, Household made its selection.

The Solution

Recruiting qualified candidates is just the first step in building an outstanding workforce. In order to keep good employees, employers need to provide opportunities for growth and development. That's why Gruner says the vendor's first task was to replace Household's internal job-posting site. A pilot solution was rolled out in just 60 days with more than 26 human resources staffers and 200 hiring managers testing it. "The pilot has evolved into our national internal job bank: Inside Track," says Gruner. "It gives employees advance notice of positions available in the company, enabling them to chart their own career paths, and move as they develop new talents and wish to advance their careers."

Now candidates, recruiters, hiring managers, vendors, and employees can access “portals” specific to their needs. For example, candidates can search for jobs, show interest in a position, formally apply, take tests, and much more. They can either attach a résumé to their application, or use the system’s profile builder to help them build a résumé for submission. To see a practical example, go to (http://www.household.com/corp/hi_ca_careers.jsp) and click on “Job Search” from the menu on the left. Among other things, hiring managers and recruiters can input job requisitions, approve them online, track them throughout the hiring process, and conduct comprehensive searches for candidates that match their requirements.

Gruner says that Household began to reap benefits almost immediately. “In its first year of use, we received 4,071 requisitions; 123,240 résumés; and processed 3,130 hires. In addition, we were able to help recruiters and hiring managers focus on quality hiring decisions rather than piles of paperwork, as well as significantly reduce administrative expenses.” Other benefits include the ability to send process-specific e-mails, conduct background checks, generate relevant management reports, and automate many other time-intensive clerical duties. Gruner says that the vendor, Recruitmax (<http://www.recruitmax.com>), “continue[s] to work with us to achieve a great return on investment.”

Is an ATS Right for You?

For Household and other large logistically diverse organizations, a solid, reliable, and flexible ATS isn’t a luxury ... it’s a necessity. But what if yours is a small- or medium-sized organization? Experts point out that as the economy improves, all employers will be faced with increased recruiting and talent management challenges in order to grow, remain competitive, and replace workers who are already seeking new jobs. One testament to that opinion: half of Recruitmax’s clients are small- and mid-sized companies.

Don’t forget to do your homework—conduct your own comparison of vendors who offer ATS services. Start by running a search online for “applicant tracking system” or “applicant tracking software,” and you’ll find there are plenty to choose from.

Retention

Wegmans

Employees Satisfied, Loyal at Wegmans

It’s not easy to make *Fortune* magazine’s annual list of “100 Best Companies to Work For” and even more difficult to make the list 7 years in a row. Wegmans Markets, headquartered in Rochester, New York (<http://www.wegmans.com>), has done it, and in 2004 moved to the number 9 position on the list. That’s quite an

honor for the family business that originally started as a “mom and pop” grocery store in the early 1900s.

Known primarily for its unique and comprehensive grocery specialties, as well as good prices, Wegmans is renowned for excellent customer service as well. This begins with Wegmans’ satisfied workforce of more than 32,000 employees, says Consumer Affairs Manager Jo Natale.

Wegmans’ Chairman Robert Wegman agrees, stating that: “Respect, fairness, honesty, and concern are what’s important to people. To my way of thinking, the only way to achieve great customer service is by treating employees right.”

Natale shared some recent statistics that demonstrate the stability and employment longevity of Wegmans’ workforce:

- ◆ The full-time employee turnover rate is 7 percent in an industry that averages 18 percent.
- ◆ 75 percent of Wegmans’ current managers started with the company when they were 15 to 16 years old.
- ◆ 11,000 employees have worked for Wegmans 5 years or more.
- ◆ 5,400 have 10 years or more of service.
- ◆ 652 employees have more than 25 years of service.
- ◆ Nearly 6,000 employees have one or more family members working at Wegmans’ 66 stores or corporate headquarters.

Natale herself provides an excellent illustration of employee loyalty and longevity. She began her career 18 years ago in a Wegmans store as a part-time pharmacy technician, eventually achieving the position of manager of consumer affairs. Her son, a college student, is also employed by Wegmans.

Cultivating Employee Dedication

How does Wegmans achieve such loyalty? Their top-notch employee benefits program may be partially responsible, but it’s more than that. Perhaps it begins with the fact that Wegmans encourages young people to come work, while the company supports their educational goals. “Thirty-seven percent of our workforce is from 15 to 22 years old,” notes Natale. Accordingly, Wegmans offers very flexible scheduling for students. “We believe firmly that work shouldn’t come first when you’re a student,” she explains. “It’s important to have a well-rounded life.” Wegmans schedules around students’ availability to work.

That philosophy is combined with a generous academic scholarship program, which keeps Wegmans very popular with the younger members of the workforce. Part-time employees who meet eligibility requirements regarding work performance and academic performance may receive \$1,500 per year for up to 4 years for their advanced schooling, and full-time employees may receive \$2,200 per year. Part-time employees who are children of full-time employees are eligible for \$2,200 per year.

Natale says that from 1984, when the scholarship program started, through 2003, more than 16,000 employees have received a total of \$52 million in education assistance.

Other employee benefits are competitive with or better than Wegmans' competitors. For example, Wegmans offers a 401(k) plan and a profit-sharing plan that is a defined contribution retirement plan. Perhaps more significantly, full-time employees whose salaries are less than \$55,000 receive free health insurance for themselves and their families. Employees with higher salaries make a small contribution toward their coverage, as do employees who choose HMO coverage instead of traditional health coverage. Some part-time employees are also eligible for coverage based on a minimum number of work hours.

Store-Level HR Focus

At the individual store level, Wegmans shows its appreciation and support for its employees in many ways, starting with the fact that each store location has its own store manager and HR manager, in addition to the corporate HR department.

Vice President of People Karen Shadders says: "The HR managers' primary role [in the stores] is to facilitate the deep rooting of Wegmans' values, advocate for employees, and facilitate problem resolution. They also advise employees and managers in all human resources processes."

The HR manager works closely with the store manager, who has the autonomy to hold employee-appreciation events and meetings as he or she sees fit. In other words, there are no edicts from headquarters telling store managers when such meetings must be held. This practice follows the Wegmans' philosophy of putting employees first. "Throughout the year, we have employee appreciation days where store and department managers set up grills and cook for employees," says Natale. "It could be lunch, breakfast, or even refreshments at an employee meeting."

Each store manager sets the tone for the warm, friendly work environment that employees expect when they work for Wegmans. And in turn, employees greet their customers with warm, friendly, helpful attitudes, which is crucial for any business whose employees regularly interact with customers.

Accenture

Promise of Flexibility Delivers Success, Retention

The path to success in career, and in life, is not often straight. In fact, there are many turnouts, detours, and accompanying choices to make along the way. Employees seeking success, then, should keep a degree of flexibility about them.

However, is that flexibility in opposition to the company's goals? It shouldn't be, according to global technology consulting and outsourcing company, Accenture. Having been recognized for their workplace flexibility by *Working Mother* magazine, among others, Accenture understands the business reasons for staying flexible.

The consulting business can be challenging, says Keith Hicks, director of human resources for Accenture's U.S. operations. "This is a business that typically requires a great deal of travel, and that can be very difficult. We discovered years ago that giving people flexibility in how they conduct business, as well as how they balance their work life and their personal life, is really important to attracting and retaining the best people. We knew we had to put in place something different to appeal to people, to attract them, and to keep them here. So we really started focusing in on flexibility as one of our key differentiators."

Among the programs created through that effort, says Hicks, is the company's flexible work arrangement initiative. "It allows all of our employees to work just about any type of flexible work arrangement that you can imagine, from a part-time work arrangement, job-sharing, telecommuting, flextime, flex hours, flex leave." And when he says all employees, that's exactly what he means. As long as it can be arranged, says Accenture's Kim McManus, the program is "offered to all of our employees up through partners. Partner is the highest level anyone can achieve in the company."

Reasons to Stay Flexible

"Flexibility," says Hicks, "is not something we do just because people want it. We do it because there is a good business reason for it." As an example, Hicks discusses "Accenture at Home," a new telecommuting program that rolled out in October 2003. Not only does it continue to meet the goal of differentiating Accenture from its competition, but it also makes it easy for employees to work at home and "allows us to save money in real estate costs," says Hicks.

McManus has been personally touched by the company's willingness to maintain flexibility. "I became pregnant with triplets. At the time, I was recruiting director for our New York office," she says. "When I was 16 weeks pregnant, the doctor indicated that I would need to have full bed rest. The partner I was working for at the time was incredible. He kept me in my role literally until the day I delivered three healthy baby boys. I had a team of over 30 people at the time, and people would come to my home for meetings, things were sent home to me, I participated, had conference calls. Then I took 6 months off, but really hoped to come back to work part-time. I came back the first month 1 day a week, then 2, then 3. When the boys were 9 months old, I was back 3 days a week, and I have been part-time ever since." Far from being a career-killer, then, McManus has continued to rise in the company and is now director of recruiting for financial services, North America.

The commitment to flexibility comes from the top at Accenture and trickles down through all levels of the company. In her situation, says McManus, "the support was absolutely incredible, from the partner I was working with, and from others. People called me and worked with me, mentoring me and helping me figure out how to get a role that was part-time in nature, but where I would be doing something that I had never done before and really continuing to build my credentials and a career path. I've had three different roles since then, and each one has allowed me more responsibility. I could never imagine working anywhere else."

Hicks adds, “Kim is a top recruiter. She’s very, very talented, and the last thing we wanted from a business perspective was to lose her because we couldn’t work it out. That’s why the partner she was working with worked it out. She was able to conduct her job literally from her living room couch. And she delivered—no pun intended—business results exactly as if she were working from her desk, 9-to-5, every day.” Now that’s flexibility.

Hunter Douglas

Mentoring, Communication Increase Retention, Workplace Satisfaction

At Hunter Douglas (HD), (<http://www.hunterdouglas.com>), a leading manufacturer of custom window coverings headquartered in Upper Saddle River, New Jersey, employee productivity and satisfaction are number one priorities for human resources. Through mentoring, employee publications, colorful benefits materials written with a lively tone and informal style, and an informative employee website, HD provides a wide variety of HR services and workplace productivity support to its employees.

With 6,000 employees in North America (and 14,000 internationally) and 28 divisions in the United States and Canada alone, HD has HR managers at every location who implement corporate HR programs in the most effective manner for each location’s specific needs.

Mentors Smooth the Way

Late last year, the American Psychological Association recognized HD as one of 15 recipients of their new “Psychologically Healthy Workplace Award: Best Practices Honors” for HD’s mentoring program, established in 2000 to stem the significant employee turnover (close to 100 percent) during the first 90 days of employment. The program has since had a dramatic effect on employee turnover, with many employees volunteering to be mentors.

Betty Lou Smith, vice president and founder of the corporate HR function at HD, says, “Our turnover rate is now averaging 15 percent for new hires on the job for 3 months or less.” This figure is well below the national average of 34.7 percent employee turnover in manufacturing.

Smith explains, “It’s very stressful when an employee begins a new job, so anything that you can do to make it more palatable is helpful.” The mentoring program uses long-term employees who have undergone training to meet with new employees at least once per week for the first 90 days. The mentors’ assistance makes it easier for new employees to adjust to their daily work responsibilities and ranges from simple things like showing them where equipment is and how to access necessary supplies to the social norms such as introducing them to other employees.

Communications are also addressed. At production facilities where production-line employees are not required to speak English, supervisors must learn to speak predominant languages in the workplace. Spanish and Vietnamese are the most common languages spoken by HD staff. Communicating with employees in their native language makes them feel more comfortable and eases the stress of trying to understand the mechanics of their jobs, explains Smith.

Many other HR initiatives and programs have been designed with communication as the foundation. With Smith at the helm of the corporate HR function for 14 years, and her partnership with Lauri Ann Romano, director of corporate training and employee development, HD's employee development activities and initiatives have been continually refined, expanded, and adjusted with ongoing measurement of results.

Expanding Channels of Communication

HD was awarded third place in the "HR Service Excellence Award" over thousands of companies nominated throughout the United States, particularly for its internal communication and employee relations activities, where it scored 24 percent above the national average in these two categories.

The company has several programs that foster good employee relations. One important training program that the company developed, "Creating Great Workplaces," uses a 12-question survey for employees that serves as a 360-degree performance evaluation from peers, subordinates, and management, as well as a 1-day workshop to assist managers and senior management at each location in creating their own great workplaces.

Other employee initiatives include:

- ◆ "Your Employment Kit"—an attractive, colorfully illustrated box full of materials about HD for new employees
- ◆ "It's Your Choice"—a fun, reader-friendly, color-coded resource that uses graphics and colors to identify specific types of benefits and benefit-related update bulletins
- ◆ "Windows of Our World,"—a 16-page, 4-color magazine employee publication produced by Romano with corporate contributors
- ◆ An attractive employee website that carries a similar colorful theme and graphics and includes information, policies, and downloadable forms

With every initiative, Romano stresses that feedback from (both corporate and local) employees is encouraged and is incorporated into refining the next generation of the publication, program, or event. As both Smith and Romano repeatedly express, putting employees first is the philosophy of the HD Corporation. Notes Smith: "Many of the initiatives that HD has implemented can be scaled for organizations of any size."

The Hartford Honors Senior Talent With Flexible Opportunities

Retaining talent has been an important part of the culture for many years at The Hartford Financial Services Group (The Hartford), a large financial services and insurance corporation based in Hartford, Connecticut, starting with the goal of attracting a diverse workforce. David Jimenez, vice president of employee relations, notes that a focus on keeping older workers at The Hartford has been an evolutionary process for the organization, which has received the accolade from AARP as one of the top 15 employers for older workers in 2002.

“The average age of our employee population [of 30,000] is moving upwards, not an unusual circumstance given the demographics of the general population with the Baby Boomers,” says Jimenez. “By 2010, about 25 percent of our current employees will be eligible to retire, so we recognize that we’re going to have a talent shortage if we aren’t able to recruit enough people to fill positions. We need to do whatever is possible to retain that critical talent.”

In addition, Jimenez reports that since The Hartford (<http://www.thehartford.com>) has been aggressive in attracting top talent and a diverse workforce to the organization, it seemed logical to develop compressed workweeks, reduced hours, teleworking opportunities, and other flexible work schedules to fit the needs of a diverse employee population.

Scheduling at Employee’s Convenience

A flexible schedule involves developing a work schedule that fits an individual’s needs, perhaps covering core hours set by the company. A compressed workweek schedule means working more hours in fewer days, while a reduced hours schedule would be a schedule that’s less than full time. Jimenez notes that The Hartford uses a 2-week work period of 80 hours that allows for more flexibility in choice of days off for an employee rather than hold an employee to a rigid 40-hour workweek.

Jimenez comments that there’s also a robust workforce of telecommuters, including employees working full-time from their homes (and sometimes even from their cars) with desktop or notebook computers, and some who work on a part-time basis, including a number of individuals eligible for retirement.

One of those eligible retirees is John Budihas, a 69-year-old executive who relocated to Sarasota, Florida, with his wife in 1999. A longtime employee of The Hartford, Budihas recounts that he wanted to move and thought that he might be ready to semi-retire to spend more time with his family. He says, “I had a two-fold desire—I wanted to continue in some capacity with the 30 years of financial planning background I had and devote more time to family and travel.”

His supervisor at the time approached him with the idea of telecommuting. Budihas describes his current position as a consultant in the business tax-trust and estate-planning areas with high-net-worth clients. He uses a Hartford Group computer and telephone line, interacting with account managers and clients all over the country from about 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. each weekday. He notes that he's often answering e-mail during off hours as well. "With retirees, you have a tremendous talent pool with invaluable experience that isn't easily replaced," says Budihas.

Jimenez estimates that about 225 employees age 55 years or older at The Hartford workforce is on some form of flexible work arrangement.

Project Work Provides More Opportunities

Another way that employees can remain involved in their careers post-retirement is by participating in temporary work assignments. Jimenez explains that The Hartford has its own internal temporary workforce, HarTemps, which has a number of retirees with a wide range of expertise within its ranks of employees. Two such temporary work projects include information technology projects and new product line development projects.

Getting Managers on Board

How does HR encourage managers with The Hartford to think about how alternative work arrangements and flexible schedules working for their staff? Jimenez explains that recruiting specialists work with HR generalists to solve talent-gap problems, discussing with managers the possibility of a particular position being handled through telecommuting or a flexible work schedule. Success stories involving alternative work arrangements are shared with managers, and the corporate intranet provides information for managers about how to manage flexible work arrangements and for employees about how to request flexible work arrangements, adds Jimenez.

Employees may approach their managers regarding flexible work schedules or work arrangements or managers may approach employees who are discussing retirement plans. Jimenez notes that the idea of retaining older workers and their talents has become imbedded in The Hartford work culture, and alternative work design is a common solution to keeping valued employees employed.

Analytical Graphics

Small Company Scores Big on Employee Retention, Productivity

Lisa Velte, director of human resources at Analytical Graphics, Inc. (AGI), probably sums up the working environment at her company best when she says: "The senior management team has passion, has vision [and] intelligence. They communicate and have the right philosophy about their employees."

This statement describes why Velte knew that she wanted to work at AGI when she joined the firm 8 years ago. She notes that she had already worked in the HR field for a variety of technology companies for 10 years when she finally found a firm

with management that was living the values she studied in college. Communication, a flat organization (access to all staff for all employees), and a focus on supporting employees' efforts to be successful (taking the place of a hierarchical structure based on rules and regulations) drew Velte to AGI.

AGI (<http://www.agi.com>), headquartered in Exton, Pennsylvania, was recognized in June by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and the Great Place to Work Institute (GTWI) as the best small company to work for in America. AGI develops and sells geospatial analysis and visualization software to more than 30,000 aerospace, defense, and intelligence professionals worldwide.

What makes AGI such a great place to work that the employee turnover rate is currently 3 percent? Some might say it's the generous perks, such as free meals for employees and their family members, the workout facilities, the dry cleaning, and other services brought on-site. However, the open communication, fun work environment, camaraderie, and true open door policy to management take the lead in making AGI's approximately 200 employees happy and productive.

Velte explains that the open door policy at AGI means just that: "Anyone can walk into anyone's office at any time and be heard." Whether it's a new idea an employee wants to share, a work issue, or a problem, Velte says that everyone, from President and CEO Paul Graziani to the other members of senior management, is there to listen.

In addition to the open door policy, AGI has several structured communication methods that keep the conversation flowing between employees and management. For example, there's an annual kick-off meeting held off-site, which all employees attend, and where the senior management team members present their objectives for the next year, beginning with the CEO. "Everyone knows what everyone else is responsible for [and working on] in the upcoming year," notes Velte. It's easy to see how the pieces all fit together.

Also, every quarter there is a status meeting when the staff gets together to discuss what the objectives were for that quarter, what was accomplished, and what is expected for the next quarter.

'Story Time' Keeps Staff Connected

Every Friday, there is an event that AGI calls "Story Time." "This is the real core of the organization and what sets us apart from everyone else," Velte explains. The entire firm gets together for lunch, including those off-site, through use of interactive video-meeting technology. The CEO starts off Story Time by talking about his week, and then anyone else can join in with his or her news. Sometimes it's work-related, such as a particular customer challenge or success, or personal, such as a new baby, someone getting married, etc. This 60- to 90-minute session keeps the entire workforce connected in a way that written communication and memos could never accomplish and fosters a sense of true camaraderie between colleagues.

In addition, just about every function within the firm has Friday wrap-up sessions, notes Velte. That time is used for summing up the workweek and planning for the next week.

Perks Result in Increased Productivity

AGI does not have structured work schedules that employees must follow, notes Velte. “We treat people the way we want to be treated, which is why we have the attitude that not making arbitrary rules works better.” According to Velte, the philosophy can best be summed up as: “You’re a professional. We trust your judgment, or we wouldn’t have hired you. This is where we want you to go [your objectives to reach], and you use your judgment to make that happen.” This translates for most employees into developing their own full-time work schedules that fit their lifestyle.

Employees are also welcome to bring their children in, and there’s a playroom, as well as laptop computers for older children to surf the Internet (with controls set up to protect them), do their homework, or communicate with their friends. Velte comments that this child-friendly policy is of great help for snow days when school is abruptly canceled or when a child isn’t feeling well.

In short, as an employer, AGI tries to support their employees by stressing open communication, having few rules and regulations, and doing their best to support their employees with perks and services that allow them to be more productive. Does it work? Last year, AGI’s revenues went up by 47 percent!

bd’s mongolian barbeque

Restaurant’s Career-Track Program Is Recipe for Recruitment Success

A high turnover rate at bd’s mongolian barbeque (www.bdsmongolianbarbeque.com) left company officials with a bad taste in their mouths. Yet less than a year after implementing a new career-track program, they’re already savoring the program’s success.

What Worked?

Based in Ferndale, Michigan, bd’s mongolian barbeque is a privately owned restaurant company with 24 locations in nine states. The company took the best ingredients of its existing cross-training program and incorporated them into Career Quest, a career-track program that maps out advancement opportunities available within the company.

Before implementing Career Quest, bd’s used to cross-train new hires in six different jobs. The goal was to help employees understand how different jobs impact each other and to provide flexibility in covering shifts. However, some employees became frustrated by that approach because of the amount of time it took to start working in their desired position, according to Dan Conley, bd’s human resources director. “We were actually losing some people.”

With Career Quest, new hires are trained in two positions—instead of six—so that they are on the job much faster. Regardless of the type of job a person is hired for, every new employee works as a “recruit” for about 1 month or until he or she has completed training in two positions. For example, someone hired as a host might also be trained as a server or a member of the kitchen staff, says Conley. After the cross-training is completed, each recruit becomes a “teammate.”

Teammates who want to take on more responsibility know what they need to do to advance. At each level, they must complete additional training, pass written tests, and/or be evaluated on their performance. The levels after teammate, in ascending order, are specialist, mentor, supervisor, manager in training, manager, assistant general manager, general manager, senior general manager, and regional director. After that comes lateral corporate and franchise opportunities. “People can enter Career Quest at various levels,” Conley says, noting that an experienced manager hired from outside the company doesn’t have to start as a “specialist,” for example.

Not every teammate has aspirations of becoming a franchise owner, or has the financial resources required to do so, of course, but Career Quest helps identify employees who want more responsibility and establishes the criteria for achieving a particular level, according to Conley.

Why Was It Introduced?

“In the restaurant industry, we have a lot of people passing through,” says Conley. Career Quest was introduced to reduce turnover in both the teammate and management positions at bd’s. The company says the program has reduced turnover by 30 percent. Once each of bd’s restaurants has implemented every feature of Career Quest, he expects the turnover rate to continue to drop.

Career Quest tackles turnover by showing teammates that they can have a career—not just a job—at the company. “Prior to formally establishing the Career Quest program, our teammates didn’t know what career opportunities existed for them at bd’s,” says founder and CEO Billy “bd” Downs. “Now Career Quest makes the progression clear, and everyone knows exactly what is required of them in order to reach the next level.”

The program has allowed bd’s to:

- ◆ Identify and develop teammates who want a career with the company
- ◆ Create a succession plan so that trained personnel are ready to step in when there’s an opening
- ◆ Improve guest (i.e., customer) satisfaction
- ◆ Boost productivity among teammates

“Career Quest has our teammates better prepared to serve their guests, which ultimately leads to better operations, greater revenue, and higher guest satisfaction,” says Downs.

What Should You Do?

Conley offers the following advice to employers that want to offer a career-track program:

- ◆ **Don't expect a quick fix.** The program will take time to develop.
- ◆ **Seek feedback from employees.** Be open to their suggestions.
- ◆ **Take little steps.** Consider rolling out the program in phases, as bd's did.
- ◆ **Provide recognition.** With Career Quest, teammates receive a \$1-per-hour wage increase when they become specialists and again when they become mentors, Conley says. In addition, specialists receive a T-shirt and mentors are given a polo shirt with their respective job levels printed on it. When teammates become supervisors, they receive a "substantially higher hourly wage" and may dress as managers do.

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