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**Compliments of Melinda Pittman, CPC**

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*The Hiring Report* is a monthly newsletter written by industry recognized recruiter Melinda Pittman, CPC of The Pittman Group, Inc. *The Hiring Report* provides articles that help employers recruit, recognize, reward and retain their workforce.

## **About Melinda Pittman, CPC**

Melinda is a Certified Personnel Consultant who has been recruiting since 1990. Melinda combines her training, expertise, and experience to help clients attract and retain top talent. Melinda is proud to be a Member of Top Echelon Network, America's leading recruiter network. Melinda provides services across the nation from her office in the Memphis, Tenn., area. These services include contingent and retained search, contract staffing, retention consulting, and recruitment strategy consulting in I.T. and where Science and Healthcare meet I.T. For more information on these services, contact Melinda at **(901) 854-6828** or **melinda@thepittmangroup.com**. For more, visit **www.thepittmangroup.com**.

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## Planning—The Key to Quality Talent Acquisition

(Originally published May, 2006)

Quality candidates—where are they, how can you get them, and how can you keep them?

These are all questions that will be asked with more frequency and with more urgency during the next five years and beyond. This statistic isn't going to make anyone feel better: the U.S. Department of Labor predicts that by the year 2010—just 4 short years away—there will be 10.3 million more jobs than people available to fill them in this country. Do we have your attention?

The upcoming candidate shortage, fueled by the imminent retirement of the Baby Boomer Generation, has been a well-documented fact. There is virtually no end to the amount of statistical data regarding this phenomenon. By 2010, over 70% of the worldwide workforce will be 65 years old. That's staggering when you consider that there are more industries and more jobs than ever before.

So if there's going to be a worker shortage overall, it stands to reason that there's also going to be a corresponding *shortage of the best and brightest workers*. It's not an exaggeration to say that the companies that have those workers will be the ones that are able to succeed the most—and in some cases, simply able to survive.

However, there is still plenty of time to take the appropriate action to ensure that you're prepared for this monumental shift in the job market.

- *First, face the truth.* This is going to happen; it's a demographic fact, not just political rhetoric or savvy statistical spin. With that in mind, the most important thing you can do is take a close look at your succession planning. That means you should be thinking about what would happen if your best employee gave you their two-week notice today.
- *Look at your overall recruiting strategy.* Consider internships, cooperatives with universities, and campus recruiting. Plan to hire more people with two or three years of experience. Overstaffing with top performers at the entry level now will save many mid-sized companies by the end of the decade.
- *Be creative and flexible with your benefits/comp plans.* Did you know that one of the hottest benefits will be flex schedules and day care? Because of conflicts between the typical 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. work schedule and when school begins/ends for your employees' children, flexibility for these working parents will be key. In addition, companies who provide corporate-sponsored day care or offer some sort of discount toward dependable day care will go a long way towards good will with their current employees and in attracting future employees.
- *Examine possible ways to transfer knowledge* from your most experienced employees, the ones who may leave in the next one to five years, to those employees who are going to remain. This could take the form of job shadowing, a mentoring program, or perhaps in-house training seminars.
- *Implement a cross-training program.* In other words, strive to spread critical knowledge among your employees. That way, if somebody leaves, there's not a dead vacuum. Someone else can pitch in for a while until a replacement is hired.
- *Strive to create a mentoring environment.* This is different than a specific mentoring program. A mentoring environment is one in which continuous teaching and learning is initiated and encouraged, both by the management and by the employees.
- *Study your compensation structure.* Is it competitive enough to hold the people you want to keep and to attract the people you're going to need? If not, it's imperative to upgrade and improve your compensation to put you in a better position to deal with the worker shortage.

This is a complex issue, but adjustments can be made to your overall strategic staffing plan. Preparation is an important part of success, regardless of the endeavor, and never has that been truer than with the impending candidate and worker shortage. The steps you take now could have long-lasting and beneficial consequences for the rest of the decade and beyond.

## Know Your Company's 30-Second Story

*(Originally published July, 2006)*

As the job climate continues to change, quality candidates are becoming more and more difficult to find. According to the Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics, the national unemployment rate for high school graduates currently stands at 4.6 percent, but for people who have four-year degrees, the rate is significantly lower, 2.2 percent. These days, applicants have many more opportunities from which to choose, and that's why companies just like you must actively recruit candidates and show them that you are the employer of choice. More importantly, you need to be able to communicate this throughout the entire interview process.

### How you tell it

In order to accomplish this, everybody involved in your company's interview process must be able to sell the company through the use of a 30-second story, one which differentiates the company, stresses its benefits, and ensures that its street reputation is a good one. In addition, everybody's story should be exactly the same, with why they stay at the company being the possible exception. (Hopefully, your company provides many reasons why employees stay, and each employee may have a different one.) The message being conveyed needs to be consistent, and any and all employees that are involved in the process should know what it is and be able to articulate it.

And if you happen to be utilizing the services of a recruiter in order to fill the position, **they** need to know what the 30-second story is, as well. This is extremely important, because what you're actually doing is making a **sales presentation** to the candidate. In effect, you're selling not only the opportunity, but the company to them. You're selling the notion that your company is the very best option they could choose and that the opportunity you have for them is the best one available.

Delivering a clear, concise, and consistent message will allow you to effectively sell both your company and the opportunity. The key to delivering that message is **communication**. You must make sure that every single person participating in the process has all of the information they need, and that information includes the details of the job description, in addition to the 30-second story. Everybody has to be on the same page. There can't be any lapses; those will compromise the interview process, potentially to the point where top-notch candidates will choose other opportunities.

### How you sell it

Making sure everybody is on the same page and delivering a consistent message is the first step. The second step is ensuring that you're selling in the correct fashion. Below are some key points to keep in mind throughout the process.

- **You're not just selling to the candidate.** You may be talking with just the candidate, but you're also selling yourself to their spouse, to their friends, and to their family. There are a lot of people you have to convince during this process.
- **Sell your opportunity as a piece of a larger opportunity.** When you're selling, make sure to let the candidate know how much potential the position has for growth. Don't ask them where they'd like to be in a few years, **but show them where they could be and what options will be available.**
- **Assume your competition is always on the ball.** As mentioned previously, star candidates have multiple options these days, and more than likely, one of them is being offered by a competitor. If you truly want to attract the high-level achievers, you must be willing to do and offer everything your competition is willing to do and offer—and then some.
- **Using a recruiter doesn't relieve you of the responsibility of promoting your company.** This is perhaps the most important point. Selling and promoting your company should be not only part of the interview process, but also part of the company's culture.

In the final analysis, selling your company and its opportunities in a strategic and consistent fashion will dramatically increase your chances of landing star candidates, regardless of where they come from. Take the time to review your interview process and to make sure that everybody involved in that process knows how to sell and knows what to sell. It could mean the difference between attracting top talent and letting the big ones get away.

## Why 'WIIFM' is the Most Important Recruiting Technique

*(Originally published March, 2007)*

Most of my recruiting clients, at some point during our relationship, will say the following: "I want to hire people who really want to work for us." From my many years in the recruiting business, I can tell you that this is a good plan. Here's the problem most clients fail to address . . . how do you get them to fall in love with you? In a previous issue of this newsletter, I wrote about comparing the offer of employment to proposing marriage. This time, I'm going to compare recruiting a star candidate to getting a date (and ultimately a long-term relationship with) the **Prom Queen** or the **Captain of the Football Team**. This analogy makes sense since you're trying to hire achievers with leadership skills and who have excellent people skills.

Assume you have identified (or a recruiter has presented) a stellar candidate. Much like the Captain of the Football Team, they know they are or will be sought after. But, you just know that if he really knew you, I mean *really* knew you, he'd want to be with you rather than other suitors. What should you do? You should use the "WIIFM" method of attraction. What is WIIFM? WIIFM is what everyone really wants to know. What's in it for **ME**?

### Step One – ASAP, share an overview of your business, presenting the following:

- Brief history of the company (What's your pedigree and are you old enough to be stable?)
- Your values, mission statement, and corporate vision (Do I want to go where you're headed?)
- Biographies of your leaders (Are your friends good enough for me to hang out with?)
- Information on your region (Do I want to live in your neighborhood?)
- Recent press releases (What have you done lately?)

*The Captain of the Football Team will only be interested in you if he knows you exist and how great you are.*

### Step Two – During the interview

- Discuss the career path for this position. Where they can be in three years? Five years? Ten years?
- Meet the team (introduce the person to the people they will work with regularly). People ultimately relate to people and if they feel they will fit in, then they'll want to join your team.
- Discuss the plan for your team's success and this person's unique role in the plan. (You're not going to hire the Prom Queen if there is no glory in the job, nor recruit an athlete without an interesting challenge!)
- Have an overview of the benefits package ready to hand to them on the way out the door. (Don't let them go home and wonder if you can take care of them.)

*The Prom Queen is only going to go out with you if you have cool friends and will take her nice places.*

### Step Three – The 4 C's of the process: comfortable, convenient, comprehensive, and conclusive

- Comfortable – Tour the facility, go to lunch, be relaxed.
- Comprehensive – Ask really in-depth questions to see who they really are.
- Convenient – Be on time and make it easy to manage, have all interviews on the same day.
- Conclusive – Come to a decision quickly. If they're right, you'll know it, so make the offer. When in doubt, quantify your concerns. If you can't quantify them, make certain it's not just cold feet! If still in doubt, forget about it. Some candidates, even though they may be top performers, aren't worth the trouble.

*Have you ever known a Prom Queen who had time to waste?*

### Step Four – Show the love, or better stated . . . 'Show me the money!'

If they're not worth spending on, then pass. If they're really that good, spend! Candidates will tell you all through the interview process, "It's not about the money, it's not about the money." Here's a secret . . . candidates lie! It's about the money. It's not all about the money, but it's about the money. If you doubt this, keep track of the candidates you lose this year due to counter-offers. It's very often about the money.

### Let's review and prepare action steps

1. Create the introductory package and benefits overview and have it easily available to hiring managers, human resources, and key recruiters with whom you regularly work. Consider putting some of this material on your website. It's best to have this in both hard copy and PDF file format.
2. Review your interview process. Is it comfortable, comprehensive, convenient, and conclusive?
3. Prepare your interview process with one thing in mind: What's in it for them? If you want them to want to work for your company . . . show them "WIIFM."

## Create More Time to Hire the Right Candidates

*(Originally published June, 2006)*

It's no secret that we live in a candidate-driven market these days. Superstar candidates are at a premium, and those companies that can find a way to uncover them and hire them will be the ones that thrive during the coming labor shortage. Although you can't create more candidates, there is one thing you can create—time. Time that you can use to assess whether or not a candidate is the right person, and time to hire candidates more quickly.

One way to do that is to streamline your interview process. Wasting time during the interview stage of your candidate search is the easiest way to miss out on a great hire, somebody who might bring incredible value to your company. There are six key techniques for accomplishing this, which I've listed below:

- **Re-evaluate the job description after someone leaves.** The person who left that role brought their own talents with them, and most likely that role “evolved” into something different than what it was previously. Make sure that the description is accurate and reflects the current needs of the company in every way—not the company's needs prior to the previous employee.
- **Circulate copies of the job description so that everybody is on the same page.** If there are issues with the job description, get those worked out *before* beginning the search. Miscommunication is the surest way to derail any process.
- **Conduct phone interviews to eliminate candidates.** You don't want to waste your department's time in face-to-face interviews with candidates you could have eliminated via phone interviews. In order to move the process along more quickly, schedule phone interviews during early morning, lunchtime, or early evening so that work schedules do not have to be rearranged.
- **Combine steps of the interview process.** Instruct candidates to fill out an online application prior to the interview, or e-mail the application so the candidates can fill it out and bring it with them to the interview. If testing is needed, have the candidates come in a few minutes early instead of asking them to come back at a later date.
- **Show everyone involved the advantage of keeping the process moving.** Candidates now have multiple offers, and if your interview process bogs down, you will lose top talent. Instead of saying that you want to hire somebody “ASAP,” decide on a firm date you need someone employed and work backwards. Make sure to deal in specifics, not generalities.
- **Become more “results-oriented” or “ability-oriented” in your job description.** Utilize this approach instead of asking for X-amount of years of experience. These days, what a candidate **did** during their years of experience is more telling than how many years they've have.

Everybody knows the saying, “He who hesitates is lost.” Well, he (or she) who hesitates in this market can lose excellent candidates. There's another saying in our industry: “Things that drag get dirty.” Sometimes it's easier to get the process rolling, but more difficult to bring that process to a close. Don't hesitate to streamline your interview process with the steps outlined above. You'll position yourself to hire more of the talent you need to take your company to the next level.

## Consider the Resume, Hire for the Behaviors

(Originally published May, 2007)

In the past couple of articles, we have discussed the various types of candidates available to improve and enhance your performance team. Opportunities for talent range from the enthusiastic “Captain of the Football Team” and the ever-alluring “Prom Queen” to the seasoned “Second Actors” and the skills they bring commensurate with their particular level of experience. Hopefully, we have added depth to your candidate pool.

Imagine you have an urgent need on your team. What happens next? The hiring manager is usually responsible for submitting their “request,” and it generally includes such items as Responsibilities, Duties, Education, Experience, and a few requisite Technical Skills or Qualifications. Some companies will also include all the ADA requisite skills and abilities, as well. Generally, the job specs stop there!

I recently attended a seminar where one of the topics discussed was the “cost of a mis-hire.” What is that, really? Most of us consider the more tangible costs—the recruiting fees, relocation costs, time and effort spent interviewing, etc. However, do you also consider productivity losses, business opportunities or bids lost, and the potential damage to your company’s reputation as a result of the aforementioned losses? These costs are just as real. So what can you do to help prevent that “mis-hire?”

When putting together the profile for the position in question, do you take a serious look at what the previous person was (or was supposed to be) doing, as well as what they should have been doing for the future? How many times have you said or heard others say, “Get me another person just like the last one.”? Does that mean you don’t want to embrace new technology or continually improve your products or processes? Of course not. But we still say it. Ideally, the profile should be set up to reflect not only where we are, but where we want to go.

Once you have evaluated what the previous person accomplished and more importantly, how they did it, have your hiring manager determine both short-term and long-term expectations for this position and incorporate the necessary skills and behaviors into the profile. Once that’s accomplished, have them take a hard look at the “interpersonal skills” and other “personal characteristics” that this new person should possess that will ensure their success once on board.

After all of this information has been prepared, you should be in a better position to target the “right” person for the job. As we discussed in the “WIFM” (“What’s In It For Me?”) article, your interview team will be prepared to sell the prospective candidate on *why* they should come to work for you. However, once you are interviewing, how are you going to determine if the person is, in fact, “right”? Of course, we all know that most of the information contained in the job description will be contained somewhere in the candidate’s resume. I say that with slight “tongue in cheek.” If only it was that easy!

So once we are satisfied that the candidate has the requisite education, experience, and technical skills, what else are we looking for? Their behaviors—specifically the type of on-the-job behaviors that indicate performance. The question you should ask yourself is *what* do they do with all of those skills and *how* do they do it? **Said another way, what behaviors do they possess that allow them to consistently accomplish and exceed expectations?**

To hire the right person, you must know exactly what *you need* for that person to accomplish in this position and the capacity they possess for reaching that desired level of achievement. Likewise, you should know exactly what that person *wants* to accomplish and the capacity they possess for reaching that desired level of achievement. *Your needs* and *their wants* should be in sync. The resume is certainly the first step in determining these crucial criteria, but ultimately, it’s not the most important one. Consider the resume, but when decision time comes, hire for the behaviors.

## Behavioral-Based Interviewing and the STAR Approach

*(Originally published June, 2007)*

In last month's issue, we touched upon a topic—behavioral-based interviewing—that's designed to help ensure more targeted and more successful hires. Although the resume is what initially catches the eye, it's the characteristics and behaviors the candidate possesses that should ultimately dictate whether or not they're hired.

The first part of the behavioral-based interviewing process, as we discussed last month, is to thoroughly evaluate the position you're seeking to fill. This is important, since you need to know what specific behaviors to look for. The next step is the actual interviewing of the candidates, and when it comes to behavioral-based techniques, the questions you ask them are quite divergent from standard interview questions.

### 'Tell me about . . .'

The main difference regarding behavioral-based interviewing questions is that they're designed to probe deeper and to uncover more information about the candidate. The key is to ask questions that will elicit detailed responses revealing not only the candidate's skills, but also how they utilize those skills and in what manner they facilitate their problem-solving strategies and their character.

Some call this approach **STAR** interviewing. The acronym stands for **Situation, Task, Action, & Result**. You present the background and the objective and then ask the candidate what action(s) they would take to achieve certain results. Another option is to ask the candidate to provide an example of a situation from their career and then walk through how they dealt with it.

The bulk of your questions will be situational in nature, either addressing a real situation from the past or a fictitious one that you're posing to the candidate. You can ask a combination of both, or they can all be real situations from the past. However, it's not recommended that they all be hypothetical. And it's not enough to ask an initial question or two and leave it at that. Follow-up questions are **essential** to discovering how the candidate will think and act in a given situation—in short, how they'll behave as a member of your team.

For example, instead of asking "Tell me about yourself," you might say, "Tell me about a situation where you had to overcome a conflict, either between you and another co-worker or between two other co-workers, in order to accomplish a common goal." And while the candidate tells their story, you can ask additional questions, such as "What were you thinking at that point" or "What led you to make that particular decision?" These questions will help you to uncover the candidate's behaviors, characteristics, and interpersonal skills.

In addition, this type of interviewing technique is more difficult for the candidate to navigate. It requires them to answer questions they didn't foresee and helps to evaluate their ability to think and respond quickly. Almost anybody can answer questions well that they're prepared for. Behavioral-based interviewing and the STAR approach will not only reveal a candidate's problem-solving characteristics based upon situational questions, they'll also reveal something about his or her behavior based upon the way they answer the questions themselves.

### It's all about 'who they are'

Behavioral-based interviewing requires a slightly different perspective and frame of mind. However, that difference can help you to not only avoid a potentially bad hire, but also zero in on the candidate who can help take your company to the next level. That's a win-win situation—and **you** win both times. While it's true that behavioral-based interviewing is more time-consuming from beginning to end, it can be much more effective at finding a candidate who's a fit all the way around.

According to one of the trainers in the recruiting industry, "**People are hired for what they do, and they're fired for who they are.**" If you hire people both for who they are **and** what they do, you'll find they might be stars at your company for a long, long time.

## The 'WOW! Factor'

(Originally published August, 2006)

Recruiting a top-notch candidate is a lot like dating. You want to find out all about him/her and you also want to present yourself in the best light possible. You get excited when you first meet such a candidate, just like after a great first date. The interview process is a lot like romance, too. If all is going well, you want it to go smoothly and at just the right moment you want to ask for a commitment, hoping for an enthusiastic "Yes!"

We've talked before about the importance of keeping the romance alive—and by that I mean keeping the interview process moving along. In this issue, I want to talk about the **offer of employment**. I'm going to keep using the dating analogy, so maybe this article will make you smile while also imparting timely advice.

Recently, I heard a stand-up comic talk about how men often propose. They get dinner reservations at a fancy restaurant, get a bottle of wine (or two), and hope that in the dim light of a romantic setting and after the glow of the wine has kicked in that he will have the courage to make the big offer. By presenting her with a shining rock, he also hopes that she will be so caught up in the moment (and possibly the wine) that she will immediately and wholeheartedly commit to a lifetime together.

There are many similarities between this scenario and the job offer. In today's market, once you get to the point in the interview process where decisions are made, you need to act swiftly and boldly.

Going back to the restaurant analogy, does the man who proposed want to hear, "Well, that's a very solid offer, but I'd like a couple weeks to think about it, as I'm dating other guys," or does he want her to say, "Wow! Of course, I'll spend the rest of my life with you!"?

The same is true in business. You want to hear "**Wow!**" So how do you get the "Wow! Factor"? Unlike the proposal, I don't encourage two bottles of wine, but I do recommend making an offer that is so attractive that the person can't say no. In our current employment market, when companies are determined to only hire great talent, great talent has choices, so you need to make an offer *they can't refuse*.

By the way, you might want to remember the shining rock, and by that I mean a signing bonus. Just like the diamond engagement ring is meant to dazzle and seek a commitment, a good sign-on bonus can have the same impact.

Here are some important things to remember about extending an attractive offer:

- For a great candidate, go to the maximum salary possible. Quibbling over ten thousand dollars for a great candidate is peanuts. Do you want your competition to be able to hire this candidate? Do you want the candidate to think about your offer or immediately say "YES!"?
- A signing bonus has an immediate, positive effect on the newly hired, yet only costs once.
- Move quickly once a decision has been made. Just like in romance, there is a time to propose and a time when it's just too late because the other person has moved on emotionally.
- Be decisive. If you want to hire, make the offer. People respect the ability of others to make a decision and are cautious about those who can't. We've all heard about commitment-phobia.
- Document your offer in writing so there are no misunderstandings later.

One last thing—when you "**Wow!**" a candidate, they are likely to accept. If the candidate says, "That's an attractive offer," you didn't "**Wow!**" them.

## Onboarding: Worth the Investment

*(Originally published July, 2007)*

You've heard it called different names—new employee orientation, employee onboarding, retention before the fact. Onboarding is a process by which employers orient and acclimate new employees into their company so they become productive more quickly and hopefully enjoy their experience so much that they're likely to stay with the organization for a long time. Whatever you want to call it, since the average stay at a company is now less than two years, onboarding is becoming more and more of a pertinent subject for companies. As you ponder the possibilities of onboarding, two questions emerge. **First**, is it really worth the investment? And **second**, how do you accomplish it? We'll answer the first question in this month's issue of the newsletter, and then we'll tackle the second question next month.

### The cure for costly turnover

Employers have a right to be preoccupied with today's turnover rates. The Institute of Management and Administration (IOMA) reports that 95% of organizations now express serious concerns about company turnover. And when replacement costs can range from 30% to several times an employee's salary, the concern is a valid one. In addition, there are start-up costs associated with each new employee that can run into the tens of thousands of dollars when you factor in training, orientation, and productivity. So again, is developing an onboarding process worth it?

Let's look at a few companies that have developed this process and see what their results have been. Ceridian recently reported that Corning's well-structured onboarding program indicated 69% of employees were more likely to remain with the company after three years than those who did not attend the program. In another instance, Hunter Douglas experienced a turnover rate reduction of 70% to 16% as a result of its onboarding program. Furthermore, Designer Blinds reduced its annual turnover from 200% to 1%! Impressive numbers.

Why does onboarding work? Think back to a time when you had some difficulty adjusting to a new job. If the company had made you feel more welcome, if they had done simple things such as made certain you had a desk and computer, given you your parking pass, taken you to lunch with your future co-workers, would it have helped? Your onboarding process doesn't have to be bulky and complicated—which is something we'll talk about next month. However, a good, systematic approach will help in many ways, including the following:

- Reduce the likelihood that your future new employee will take a counteroffer
- Begin building rapport with the new company and colleagues
- Reduce misunderstandings
- Build an optimistic attitude towards the company
- Build motivation and job satisfaction
- Reduce new employee anxiety
- Decrease the learning curve
- Give employees a sense of purpose and make them feel as if they're adding value more quickly

### What decision did they make?

After all, isn't a new employee who adjusts well and reaches quick productivity levels what you want? Think of it this way: onboarding is an integral part of your overall retention program. In fact, onboarding can help you to build a **comprehensive** retention program that decreases your turnover rate, just as it did for Corning, Hunter Douglas, and Designer Blinds. What's important to remember is that onboarding is a process that starts immediately, and by that I mean even before the offer is extended. That may sound a bit extreme, but what it boils down to is the chance to make a great first impression—and a first impression that serves two practical yet crucial purposes.

**First**, the employee will subconsciously decide that they made the right decision in accepting your offer. When people first start a new job, they're looking for signs that they either made the right decision or the wrong one. Onboarding will help assure them that joining your company was a smart move. **Second**, armed with this positive affirmation, the employee will tackle their new position and responsibilities with vigor and enthusiasm, further ensuring that they're successful as soon as possible and that they stick around for a long time.

So, the questions you might want to think about are these—what impressions are you giving **your** new employees, and could an onboarding program enhance those impressions?

# Creating a Successful Onboarding Program

(Originally published August, 2007)

In last month's issue, we discussed the concept of onboarding and why it represents a solid investment both in terms of reducing your turnover ratio and increasing your overall productivity. But what does a comprehensive onboarding program include? And when and how should you implement such a program? These are two of the questions we're going to tackle in this month's issue.

The type of onboarding program each company creates and implements ultimately depends upon how much time and energy the company is willing to spend. For the purposes of this article, we're going to analyze a fully comprehensive program, focusing on how it should be implemented and when you should do so.

## Create Your Program

At its essence, an onboarding program has three main components—the people involved, the content involved, and the timeframe involved.

### People

It's important to identify who's going to be part of the process, since they will also be part of the planning the creation of the onboarding program. Typically, it should include the new hire, an HR professional, and the manager or person to whom the new hire will report. That's in a literal sense. In a general sense, the entire organization should have a working knowledge of the company's onboarding philosophy so that every member can deliver a strong and consistent message to every new hire, reinforcing the program and enhancing its effectiveness.

### Content

This can be broken down into three areas: the administrative details, the job duties and specifications, and the company culture. The **administrative details** are the easiest to tackle, and they should be completed as soon as possible, so that you can focus on the other two areas, which are more important in terms of success and productivity. The new employee should not have to worry about voice mail, email, or even gaining access to the building, not to mention all the necessary paperwork that must be in place prior to the first day on the job. Be proactive about these administrative details so they don't evolve into distractions later on. I heard a horror story regarding a computer programmer who quit his new job after only two weeks because the company had not provided a *computer* for him to work on!

Make certain your new hire feels welcome from Day One. Below are a few basic ideas:

- Order business cards in advance so you can provide them on the first day.
- Have the workstation and (working) computer ready with a working email address.
- Schedule someone to take the new hire to lunch on their first day.

**Job duties and specifications** are just that—the job description for the new hire, the things they'll be expected to accomplish. Prior to the employee's first day, they should talk with their immediate supervisor and discuss those duties and expectations, including project deadlines and timetables. The two should also discuss the employee's initial orientation and training schedule, which should take no more than a week. The key is effective communication and exchange of knowledge beforehand, which will help to speed up the process once employment begins. There should be milestones for the first few months and you should schedule meetings to assess progress and discuss obstacles.

**Company culture** is sometimes overlooked, but is extremely crucial. The new hire should know as much as they can about the culture before they start. (Keep in mind that culture embodies many criteria, including language, methodologies, mission statement, ways of interacting, traditions, etc.) A good idea would be for the hire to meet informally with a few members of the current team and talk about how things worked at the hire's previous company and the way in which they operate at their soon-to-be present place of employment.

### Timeframe

The beginning of the onboarding process is easy to identify—it's the moment that the candidate accepts your offer. Between then and the first day of the new hire's employment, the steps we've discussed to this point should be completed, especially the administrative matters. However, the onboarding process doesn't stop there. Once the hire begins work, their progress should be tracked and there should be almost constant communication between

the employee and their supervisor. The more quickly potential problems can be identified, the faster they can be solved—or avoided altogether. And remember, the first 30 days are vitally important because it's during this time that the new hire makes a subconscious decision regarding whether or not joining your company was the right move. After 90 days, it's recommended that all parties involved meet to discuss progress, solicit feedback, and plan for the future.

### **Customize Your Program**

As you can see, onboarding is a multi-faceted endeavor. However, it's one that can pay huge dividends for your company and its employees. What's important to remember is that onboarding programs should be **individualized** to the needs of the company creating and implementing them. There isn't just one model for everybody. There's a basic framework and formula, to be sure, but in order for the program to be the most effective, you and your team must create and implement a version that you can incorporate easily and seamlessly into your company's business model.

## What Would It Be Like If Work and Life Were in Balance?

*(Originally published September, 2007)*

In this issue, we're going to take a look at the subject of work-life balance and discuss ways in which you can increase retention through strategies revolving around this growing issue. In today's workplace, employers are becoming more and more imaginative in helping employees to bridge the gap between life and work. Research shows that helping employees achieve a work-life balance pays big dividends, including cutting soaring health costs and energizing performance and commitment.

It's September, and we just observed the Labor Day holiday. Did you know Labor Day was started over 100 years ago as a protest for workers demanding eight hours of work, eight hours of rest, and eight hours for the family? Work and life balance is a basic need. Today, Labor Day is observed as a celebration of the working population, as well as the end of summer.

So with autumn on the horizon, I'd like to continue to recognize the working population (and if you're reading this, yes, you are one of us!) by asking this question, "What would it be like if work and life were in balance?" I'd also like to offer some ideas about how you can help your staff. Think of the hiring attraction and retention you'll be able to cultivate!

One recent survey of employees showed that even though job satisfaction may be high, the majority of workers rated the balance of work and family life as more important than **any other employment factor**. Below are some ways in which helping employees strike that balance can be beneficial:

- Attracts new employees
- Helps to retain staff
- Builds diversity in skills and personnel
- Improves morale
- Reduces sickness and absenteeism
- Enhances working relationships between colleagues
- Encourages employees to show more initiative and teamwork
- Increases levels of production and satisfaction
- Decreases stress and burn-out

### Let's look at where we are:

For the first time in American history, four generations—Veterans, Baby Boomers, Generation Xers, and Generation Yers—are working side-by side. This new workplace diversity can present challenges for employers in many areas. For the purposes of this article, I'd like to address work-life balance initiatives for all and provide a few ideas that promote the notion that maybe one size **can** fit all! Simply put, work-life balance initiatives are any benefits, policies, or programs that help foster a better balance between the demands of the job and the enjoyment of life outside of work.

### Let's look at the need:

In doing my research for this article, I discovered that 87% of today's working population's biggest challenge and cause for stress results from **household responsibilities**! Think about it: if your household responsibilities were taken care of, or reduced, you would have more time for your life.

### Let's look at a few simple solutions:

Whether you work for a large corporation or a small family business, we all have basic responsibilities of life, and you, as the employer, can be a hero to your employees by providing practical solutions. Most will cost you absolutely nothing except for the time it takes to put them together. I believe this can be successful for day, evening, and night shifts.

I suggest that you use your negotiation skills to secure significant discounts for each of the services below for your employees:

- Delivery of groceries (that your employees have ordered on-line), either to their homes or the work place. People will spend four to five hours shopping for groceries each week, and that doesn't include stopping on the way home for that last-minute dinner or take out! Offer delivery at least two times per week.
- Housecleaning services. Smaller operations do a tremendous job at much better rates.
- Laundry service, pick-up, and delivery.
- Lawn service. I recommend smaller operations, which would benefit from the additional business.
- House painting or repairs. These are projects that employees often use their vacation or holiday time to complete. Helping in this area would be of tremendous benefit to them.
- Auto repair or detailing. Find a business that will come to your location weekly.
- Pharmacy deliveries
- Daycare or childcare services
- Elder care services
- Health club facilities

Now take a moment and ask yourself this question: **“What would it be like if my work and life were in balance?”** By answering this question, you can envision how offering these solutions can relieve the stress in your employees' lives and create more balance for them. Now conduct an informal survey of your employees, supervisors, and managers. Ask about their specific needs and/or concerns, and base your course of action on their answers.

You can be tremendously effective for your employees, as well as cover all shifts worked, by offering discounted services that address the household responsibilities issues. The availability of these services will add hours to your employees' lives, which they can spend however they choose. And when it comes to job satisfaction and how those same employees feel about the company for which they work, you can bet they'll choose to be more loyal and to resist the temptation to go elsewhere.