Begin at the Beginning – Recruitment and Selection

There are really three issues surrounding recruitment. First, you need to find quality candidates to interview and it seems they are increasingly in short supply. Second, the research suggests that one-third to one-half of annual turnover is comprised of employees who are dismissed. Third, as much as half the employees that some organizations lose during a year leave during the first three months.

Improving recruitment, selection and orientation practices is at the heart of any retention initiative. If you do it right the first time you won't have to fix it.

The latter two factors point to problems with recruitment and also with orientation (please see Chapter 5).

I have heard many managers and supervisors lament, "There are just no qualified applicants anymore." They are commenting on the small number of people responding to advertisements placed in local papers. These ads once generated dozens and sometimes hundreds of applications. While we complained about having to screen and interview so many people, most managers would like to go back to "the good old days" even for just one competition!

What has also changed are the qualifications of applicants. Once employers had a pool of qualified people from which to choose. Now the pool is a mere puddle and seems to be continuing to shrink.

Perhaps we need to reframe this dilemma. First, consider the idea that the best people, those who we wished were working for us, are working somewhere else. Rather than believing "the good people are no longer out there", we need to create ways of letting people know we need them to work for *us*. This means we need to change our strategies in order to find and attract them. Small conventional newspaper ads are not likely to have any impact because most of these people are not looking for jobs.

Secondly, we need to rethink "qualified" as "quality". We can train for skill but not for talent or for attitude. Perhaps our practices must shift to hiring people who have talents, values and qualities that match our organization's needs. Then we must orient, train and supervise so they gain competence and confidence in their job tasks. Unlike the employees of the past who came "ready-made" to our qualification specifications, employees of the future will be "custom-fitted" by us. Hiring for talent, values and attitude is therefore, essential. Most everything else can be learned.

There are dozens of books and book chapters devoted to the technical steps of proper recruitment (please refer to "There's More to Read" at the end of this chapter). You may also wish to read my earlier book *The Supervisor's Big Book of Answers* (1999). Consulting these resources is essential as you develop your recruitment policies and practices. Make sure you choose books that are less than five years old. Human resource theory and practice changes over time and you want to use only current ideas in developing your recruitment guidelines.

The following series of strategies are not intended to cover the *basics* of recruitment. Instead, these ideas are intended to spark some creative approaches to attracting, screening, interviewing and selecting employees. Recruitment is an active (go find 'em) rather than a passive (let 'em come to us) process. The tried

> *"Doing the same thing over and over will <u>never</u> give you a different result."*
>
> Unknown

and tired practice of placing advertisements in the newspaper is no longer generating the kind of response that justifies the expense. The following 20 strategies will help you explore some new options.

<u>Strategy #1</u> Look in different places for applicants

Consider posting advertisements or organizational newsletters in locations where likely candidates may be found. Possibilities include:

◊ churches and church bulletins

◊ laundromats

◊ shopping centres

◊ pharmacies, grocery stores and banks

◊ professional offices (doctors, dentists, chiropractors, etc.)

◊ sports centres (arenas, bowling alleys, swimming pools)

◊ neighborhood or community newsletters

◊ daycares and schools

◊ college and university student housing

◊ college and university newspapers.

To customize this list for your organization and community, hold a brainstorming session with current employees and clients/customers. Make sure you record where you place your ads or flyers and ask applicants where they saw your job posting. Track which

locations have the best response and don't return to those that generate little or no interest.

Strategy #2 Look further afield

Across the country there are areas with high unemployment and underemployment. Underemployment means that there are people with qualifications that are greater than required by the positions they are holding. This means you should consider recruiting (or at least advertising) in areas beyond your own community. For example, a few organizations in Alberta, where there is a serious labour shortage, have been successful in hiring people from the Maritimes and Newfoundland, where unfortunately unemployment is the highest in Canada.

The excessive cost of interviewing in person may be avoided by using telephone screening, multiple telephone interviews and comprehensive reference checks. If you have access to internet technology and a camera – a "virtual interview" video conference is very inexpensive.

Within your community, especially in urban centres, there may also be immigrants or new Canadians who are looking for work. If English is their second language, they may experience real difficulty finding jobs that match their educational or experiential qualifications. Approaching cultural organizations, service clubs or sponsoring agencies (such as churches) may lead to some successful recruitment possibilities.

Strategy #3 Ask current employees for referrals

Your current employees should be an endless supply of connections and referrals for new employees. Happy employees are great ambassadors for employers. Don't overlook their family members and friends as contacts as well.

Researchers have found retention rates are higher among new employees referred by current employees. This could be because current employees fill the new person in on exactly what to expect on the job and from the organization. Consider creating an incentive for employees by using a "finder's fee" for each applicant referred and a higher fee if the person is offered a position and accepts. The "fee" may be:

◊ a cash incentive

◊ a point system toward special benefits or larger items (this encourages ongoing referrals)

◊ additional training opportunities

◊ prizes or special gifts (these must have real value to employees – avoid mugs, pens and T-shirts)

◊ additional benefits (e.g. holiday time, bonus days)

◊ coupons or discounts for local businesses (e.g. free winter car inspection or tire rotation)

◊ lottery or fundraising tickets.

Consult your employees about what they would like to see on the list. Offering a range of incentives will be better than offering just one or two. What appeals to one person may not appeal to others. For overly zealous employees, you may need to set a limit on the number of incentive payments available in any one year.

<u>Strategy #4</u> Attend public events and community functions to network and recruit

Count the number of special events, group dinners and public gatherings you have attended in the past year or so. Multiply this by the number of colleagues or co-workers with whom you work. Together you have contact with hundreds, perhaps thousands of people in a year. Use these opportunities to network with people who may be potential candidates or may know someone who is looking for a new challenge.

Always carry a few basic recruitment supplies to these types of gatherings including:

◊ your business cards and/or cards for the person who does the hiring in your organization

◊ a brochure about the organization

◊ a flyer or job posting sheet.

If someone seems interested or has a potential referral, always follow up with them by telephone or e-mail a few days later.

Volunteering for community-based organizations (e.g. sitting on boards or committees) is another way to network.

<u>Strategy #5</u> Treat recruitment as an ongoing, rather than position-specific activity

Our current economy is driving organizational growth at unprecedented rates. Gone are the days when organizations are fully staffed. Growth and turnover create the need for constant recruitment. Make your recruitment strategies broad-based and long term. Use many different approaches with many involved people at the same time. Keep careful records of what approaches are resulting in the best number of responses. Keep generating new approaches. Try at least one new approach every two or three months.

Strategy #6 Host open houses, special community events and job fairs

The intent of these events is to draw a wide range of community members into your organization's facilities or programs. Once they have arrived, educate them about what you do and let them know you are looking for motivated, talented and skilled people. This is part of teaching the broader community your organization is "open for business" in more than one way. People may or may not know what you really "do over there". Bring them through your door and you have a chance to educate *and* attract new talent.

Strategy #7 Create your own internal headhunter program

When you visit other organizations or businesses, look for employees who seem to be customer service oriented, pleasant, are good communicators, efficient and/or are skilled in areas similar to your work. Approach these people saying: "You know, you have a really great way with people. My organization is always looking for new people who have something positive to contribute. If you're ever interested, here's how you can reach us."

The risk of using this strategy is that you may end up recruiting under-qualified people. However, many employers have discovered the value of hiring for attitude and training for skills. A second risk is that you may not be very popular with other employers from whom you recruit staff. However, if these employers have really great workplaces – their employees will not be tempted to leave no matter who approaches them.

Strategy #8 Develop a partnership with local high schools for volunteer and/or work placement programs

Historically, high schools have approached employers about volunteer work or work placement experiences for students. Why not approach local high school principals, individually or as a group, and propose a partnership program? The program could include:

◊ students volunteering part of their school day or after school

◊ students working part-time (or relief or casual) when their age and academic standing allows

◊ students completing work placements with the organization.

One employer has created just such a partnership. When a student volunteer turns 18 years of age, he/she is presented with a birthday card and an offer of part-time employment with the organization. In their volunteer roles, students have received basic training (e.g. first aid, CPR, crisis intervention, orientation to policies, etc.). They are actually better qualified than many candidates who respond to job advertisements.

Supervisors: A Vital Link in the Retention Chain

Chapter 6

It should be clear from our discussion thus far that supervisors and managers both play a vital role in creating a quality workplace. If you review the list of factors (Chapter 2) that influence job satisfaction, you will note many are either supervisory responsibilities or can be directly influenced by supervisors.

If you are a new supervisor, it is recommended that you pick up a copy of my earlier book, *The Supervisor's Big Book of Answers (1999)*. Order forms are included at the end of this book. There are also many other excellent books on supervision available at your local bookstore.

This chapter presents fifteen strategies to assist supervisors in improving the quality of the workplace and employee retention.

Research has demonstrated the amount and quality of supervisory contact, supervisor's leadership style, skill and experience all impact on employees' decisions to remain on the job for the long term.

25 Things Supervisors Can Do to Improve Retention

Before we turn to specific strategies, let's look at a list of 25 things supervisors can do to positively influence retention.

1. Hire the right person.

2. Provide a thorough and timely orientation.

3. Create a sense of belonging among all employees.

4. Encourage the development of constructive and supportive relationships among co-workers.

5. Have regular, planned/scheduled (ideally face-to-face) contact with employees.

6. Give regular positive feedback regarding performance and contributions.

7. Recognize and reward success in a variety of ways.

8. Give direct, honest and constructive critical feedback when necessary.

9. Demonstrate effective problem intervention.

10. Resolve conflict using win-win solutions.

11. Create flexibility with tasks and schedules.

12. Make exceptions and bend rules when the situation requires.

13. Recognize individual talents and gifts of each employee; match job roles with talents.

14. Raise the bar. Set high, achievable expectations and communicate them clearly.

15. Support employees to succeed using training, coaching and mentoring.

16. Model open, honest, frequent communication; always listen to understand.

17. Share power.

18. Involve employees in decisions that affect them.

19. Accept feedback.

20. Acknowledge mistakes and learn from them.

21. Manage change skillfully.

22. Provide meaningful, constructive, "no surprise" performance appraisals.

23. Respond quickly and supportively to performance issues.

24. Support employees during personal problems or crises.

25. Help employees achieve career and educational goals.

15 Things Supervisors Do That Will *Increase* Turnover

On the flip side of the coin, here are 15 supervisory behaviours that negatively influence employee job satisfaction and morale and therefore, increase turnover.

1. Misusing positional power or authority (use of autocratic or authoritarian "leadership" styles).

2. Having unclear or unreasonably high expectations.

3. Failing to make decisions or delaying decisions unnecessarily.

4. Long absences and/or having minimal contact with individual employees or with the work group/team.

5. Resisting change or managing change ineffectively.

6. Failing to accept or respond to constructive critical feedback.

7. Voicing negative attitudes toward management or toward the organization as a whole.

8. Treating employees harshly or unfairly.

9. Rigidly and/or unreasonably interpreting or enforcing policies or procedures.

10. Indirect or dishonest communication.

11. Failing to follow through on promises or commitments.

12. Failing to effectively manage employee performance problems.

13. Over-involvement in employees' jobs or taking over previously delegated tasks (micro-managing).

14. Over-using critical feedback and under-using rewards and recognition.

15. Treating some employees preferentially.

It is impossible to read these two lists without thinking: "Wow, this is a really tough job." Indeed, there is a great deal riding on supervisors doing their jobs well. As a result, there is also great potential for supervisors to have direct positive impact on employee retention.

Strategy #31   Ensure all supervisors and managers develop competence and confidence

Many supervisors and managers have come up through the ranks or have built a career path based on technical or professional competence in areas other than supervision. This means they are highly skilled at many things other than being a supervisor. Many long-term supervisors have learned from the "fly by the seat of your pants" school of supervisory development.

The skilled supervisor of the future will be required to master a fairly long list of rather complex skills. Formal training, coaching and ongoing support should be available to them in the following areas:

◊ effective and systematic problem solving (especially in group situations)

◊ small and large group facilitation and meeting management

◊ mentoring

◊ team building

◊ employee discipline

◊ presentation skills

◊ teaching (group and individual adult education techniques)

◊ change leadership and transition management

◊ performance management

◊ situationally appropriate use of leadership styles (e.g. coaching, delegating, directing, participating)

◊ conflict resolution (mediation skills).

Formal classroom style training (e.g. workshops, courses or seminars) in these areas is

"The aim of education is not knowledge, but action."
Unknown

not sufficient. This type of training certainly increases knowledge, however, to create *skill, competence and confidence* most supervisors require practice, mentoring and follow-up support.

Strategy #32   Build strong relationships, bonds and trust among employees at all levels

Generation X and NinGen employees will demand their workplaces provide them with opportunities to build strong and sustaining relationships. This does not mean work relationships replace family or other friendships. To the contrary, these two generations of employees strongly value life-work balance. The need for relationships at work means we must create a sense of community based on mutual caring and support.

Relationships and trust are created by:

◊ making promises and keeping them ("walking your talk")

◊ spending time with all the people you supervise

◊ treating people with respect and fairness in all circumstances

◊ encouraging truth-telling and meaningful dialogue

◊   creating safety for open communication.

Strategy #33   Create a mentoring program

Think for a moment about someone in your life who has been your mentor. How important has she/he been to you, your career or family life? What have you learned as a result of your mentor's presence and influence?

A mentor can make a significant difference for employees who are new, who are struggling with some aspect of their duties, or who want to learn and grow in their work lives. Employer sponsored mentoring has been shown to double the number of people who intend to stay with their employer for another year or more (Kaye and Jordan-Evans, 1999).

"Someone who gets no help makes no progress."
Unknown

There are several options for how to approach a mentoring program:

◊   create an informal network of mentors and employees

◊   as a supervisor, become a mentor

◊   invite individual interested employees to find their own mentors (inside or outside the organization)

◊   create a formal mentoring program.

The latter option is more labour intensive but may also provide significantly more benefits in exchange. The steps for creating a more formal program include:

◊   consulting with employees regarding what their needs are and how some of these needs could be met by mentoring

◊   developing a role description for mentors and for protégés

◊   developing guidelines for how protégés and mentors will be matched

◊   preparing a training program for mentors so they understand their role and its limits

"Keep company with those who may make you better."
English saying

◊   creating a few matches to pilot the new program; invite feedback from the mentors and protégés and make adjustments to the program

◊   advertising the program internally; be clear about what mentors and protégés can reasonably expect of each other (time commitments, roles, limitations, boundaries).

The role of a mentor includes:

◊ providing individual work-related support (problem solving, guidance, stress management, etc.)

◊ providing coaching or teaching on tasks

◊ encouraging and rewarding skill development, risk taking and growth

◊ supporting taking responsibility for and learning from mistakes

◊ holding up a mirror for the protégé to increase self-awareness and personal growth

◊ supporting career development and goals.

Mentors give of their time and wisdom. However, their relationships with protégés are mutually beneficial. For many skilled or senior employees, being asked to advise, support and guide is rewarding and fulfilling. Best yet, being part of a mentoring program strengthens the ties people have with each other. Strong relationships are vital to a healthy workplace.

Strategy #34   Work toward supporting family life and work life as parts of the whole

Many contemporary authors are challenging the notion that employees should not "bring their personal lives to work." If you consider this old axiom, it is quite ridiculous. The idea implies that employees should live compartmentalized existences where home and family never meets work and colleagues. Our personal lives and families have made many compromises in favour of our work lives and careers. It is, therefore, reasonable to expect employers to make certain compromises so we can meet our personal and family needs.

> *"Live for another if you wish to live for yourself."*
> Seneca

For supervisors, this means being flexible in several different ways: