

Purpose

The purpose of this research effort was to obtain the experiences, opinions and recommendations of some of the leading HR professionals in the state of Virginia regarding the hiring of workers in (blue-collar) entry-level jobs. Goodwill will use this information to help develop its training program, so its trainees will be better prepared to advance successfully through the application, interview and hiring process.

Research Plan and Methodology

Martin Research recruited and conducted a total of eighteen small focus groups throughout the state of Virginia. The groups were distributed as follows:

- September 8 Blacksburg, VA – 1 group
- September 8 Roanoke, VA – 2 groups
- September 9 Danville, VA – 1 group
- September 9 Lynchburg, VA – 1 group
- September 10 Fredericksburg, VA – 2 groups
- September 11 Richmond, VA – 2 groups
- September 15 Winchester, VA – 1 group
- September 15 Staunton, VA – 1 group
- September 16 Charlottesville, VA – 2 groups
- September 22 Abingdon, VA – 1 group
- September 24 Alexandria, VA – 2 groups
- September 25 Hampton Roads, VA – 2 groups

All of the focus groups were with Managers of HR or Personnel for their respective organizations. To recruit the groups, Martin Research utilized the opt-in response of members in a recent SHRM survey, and supplemented the list with names provided by the Goodwill organizations in each of the above locations.

We recruited a total of five participants for each of the focus groups, and there were five participants in most of the groups. Show rates were excellent. Participants were paid \$100 for their participation.

To ensure continuity from the beginning of the process to the end, Frank Martin, CEO of Martin Research, moderated all eighteen of the focus groups and is the author of this summary.

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This report will provide a summary of the findings from each of the individual markets, as well as a general summary of the learning and major conclusions from **all the groups** across the Commonwealth.

The groups in Roanoke, Richmond, Alexandria and Tidewater were videotaped, and copies of the DVDs are available now. Groups in the other areas were audiotaped and the tapes will be available to those markets following preparation of this report.

Greater Abingdon Area

*What are the situations and challenges in the finding, interviewing, hiring and retention of your **entry-level employees** that give you the most headaches as HR Managers for your organizations?*

Challenges in recruiting and maintaining entry-level employees

WE had more HR reps that recruit for hard, physical work in the SW VA focus group. There is more of this type of work here than in other areas of the state.

- Our entry-level wage for labor is \$7.25 per hour, and it's tough to get decent people at \$7.25 an hour. We just keep dragging the applications in...
- Our work is not for everyone – it's very physical and hard work. It's a good rate of pay, just very hard. It's a matter of just uncovering enough stones to find people who are willing to do it.
- We have to hire four to hope to keep two – it's hard manual labor.
- Trying to find somebody who wants to work is hard – they don't want to work. We have found that the older workers are more inclined to come in and do the job than the younger people. ↙
- “Younger people have no work ethic – I see **that** all the time.” (She thinks we have conditioned today's younger people to believe they don't have to work hard to get ahead.)
- The kids aged 19 – 24 want to give you two days a week – all they care about is having some spending money in their pocket.
- I've learned also that a lot of these younger workers don't pay their bills, and if they do stick around for a while they get a garnishment stuck on them.
- We're a lot tougher on the front side than we used to be – we screen out a lot of the job hoppers or problem employees. We also have an extensive training program.

This company also had a “buddy system” to help new employees get oriented.

Problems in Attracting and Keeping Employees

To help them see beyond where they are now

- We also need to let the employees know what they need to do in order to get to the next level, and what is the next level.
- Motivation to work is a major problem – dealing with the attitudes of the people who do not want to work.
- **Positive attitude** – one of the most important things any worker can have, and one of the most important in all of the groups across the state.
- Critical thinking – so many can't think for themselves; you have to tell them every step of the way
- Flexibility – people should be willing to do whatever is needed to be done over the course of the day's work; they aren't. They want to pick their work.
- “Productivity is not something we expect from these employees.”

This quote betrays their attitude regarding the capabilities of their entry-level workers.

What are the *basic skills and training* that you would like for all entry-level applicants to have had to provide them with the best opportunity for success?

The best way to approach this question seemed to be to break out the skills into “hard” and “soft” skills. Hard skills would include teachable skills such as basic math, operating a cash register, etc., while soft skills might focus upon “coaching” in some of the work ethic issues covered earlier.

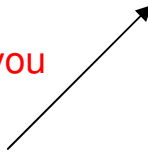
Hard Skills - Teachable

- Reading, writing and math – just the basic skills
- Basic problem solving skills
- Basic home economics – how to do a budget, balance a checkbook
- How to fill out an application for an interview – in full

Soft Skills – Coachable

- Younger people need to learn that you prioritize what you want in life and the good times can come later.
- Financial management
- Motivation – for people who do not have a college education
- Cooperation and team effort
- How to get along with others
- Work ethic
- Reliability, attendance, punctuality
- Respect for authority
- Establishing goals
- Basic manners
- Responsibility
- Dedication
- Accountability
- Respect for your property and that of others
- How to take care of themselves: being able to function, keep clothes clean, life skills

“It’s hard to teach these skills once you get to be 25 years old – but it’s desperately needed.”



What makes the Abingdon area different and unique from other areas of Virginia with respect to the needs of employers and employees?

- Many of these jobs are harder physical labor, as opposed to office jobs.
- Rural community, with rural people.

Recommendations to Goodwill for Training

- Goodwill needs to work with employers to help them develop strategies for keeping entry-level workers. This will involve mentoring and working with new employees to help them mature, and to help them feel as though they are a part of the team.
- Goodwill is going to have to create hope for many people who have none. And it might be helpful to find people who have been in similar situations (dead-end jobs, criminal history, high school dropout, self-destructive mentality) who could relate to them at their level.
- Coach people and help them develop the soft skills mentioned earlier
- Look at how you best bring about the changes mentioned earlier
- Consider maybe training away from their hometown – to get them away from what is familiar
- Help them learn **life skills** – skills that will serve them well wherever they end up.

The thinking is that these people need to have someone with who they can identify – who can relate to them in their own language.