

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.

R eport Format and Video/Audio Tapes

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 New River Valley 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

- A lot of our issues have to do with attendance and customer service – with the employee not realizing the level of performance that is going to be needed – in customer service, attitude, and appearance. This causes “churn” and cost a lot of HR time.
- Getting them to understand what is acceptable attire for the workforce (and for interviews)
- Attitude and respect for co-workers
- People who follow instead of showing a lot of initiative
- Lack of basic skills such as arithmetic, being able to add numbers, read a tape measure – these deficiencies really hinder employees from moving up and getting out of the entry level jobs.
- Huge lack of work ethic: attendance, attitude
- People can go work at Taco Bell and Wendy’s and make as much as we pay them. We can’t afford to pay them more than what we do now. There is a lot of this in the NRV now – and companies have come to accept the job-hoppers.
- Negative Attitudes:
 - I’ve always done it this way
 - If I lose this job I can always get another one; “job recycling”
 - **Entitlement:** I’m entitled to this job, to decide what time I come in, to decide how long I work, to decide what parts of the job I will do and won’t do, to stay home if I don’t feel good
 - I don’t care
 - It’s your responsibility, not mine (even things that have to do with the employee personally). Lack of ownership of problems
 - It’s not my fault (that they came and arrested me, that the teacher gave me an “F”, that I have garnishments...) no sense of personal responsibility.
- Basic job skills are lacking in a lot of new hires.

Lost entry-level jobs are easily replaced, which means employees don’t value them.

Most of these were mentioned in ALL of the focus groups across the state.

Many of the problems can be traced back to dysfunctional households

- What's missing in training is common sense work ethic type training, the kind that tells you all employers are different and have different rules, procedures and expectations, that you need to remain flexible, etc. Most of these things you learn from parents as opposed to learning in school or training programs. In many cases, the parents did not provide this type of training.
- We are seeing that new employees can't fill out their employment papers – they have to go home and get a relative to help them. These employees are able to read, but lack the cognitive skills to understand some concepts.
- It's amazing to me the amount of personal/home issues that come into the workplace and impair people's ability to function. "Things that require them to be on a cell phone all day long."
- People at the lower levels of the pay scale do not treat their jobs like a priority; people at the upper levels do.
- Many employees, including younger ones, are totally out of touch with computers. Schools need to train for using a computer, before more are left behind. So much communication, sign-ups, applications, etc. happen on the computer now.
- How to maintain their own personal finances – we see a lot of employees that live from paycheck to paycheck – who have no thought of saving. Debt is killing them.
- It used to be the mentality that a job was to be respected – the younger generation is not being taught this now. Not at home, and not at school.
- Confidence is lacking in a lot of new hires.
- If one of current employees takes a new employee "under his wing", that can be good or bad depending upon the quality of the current employee.

Establishment of goals may help with this – to help employees see further than a few days or weeks down the road. They have no planning for IRA's or retirement.

This is a problem statewide.

Problems in the workforce: what to do about them?

**Common
problems
statewide among
all employers**

- A positive attitude and desire to learn can overcome a LOT of problems.
- Communication and critical thinking – “in my view neither the verbal nor the written communication capabilities are that good among the entry-level employees. I do not see critical thinking on the radar (especially for business decisions)”.

**The
underpinning of
any successful
work experience**

- Positive attitude and motivation – People are motivated by different things, and you have to find out what that is.
- Flexibility – they want employers to be flexible with them, but they don't want to be flexible about the jobs they do or the hours they work.
- Follows directions – people don't listen.
- Peer interaction and interpersonal skills
- Productivity

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

- Basic skills such as math, reading and writing
- Personal finance
- Personal hygiene
- Communication skills – verbal and written
- Filling out application forms: application, tax forms and benefits information
- Basic computer skills

Soft Skills – Coachable

- Better training on overall work ethic
 - Getting to work every day on time
 - Scheduling or personal business (Dr. car service) during non-work hours
- Attitude – have a “can do” attitude
- Try – don’t say you can’t do it
- Goal setting – personally and professionally
- Making the job a priority
- Appearance – looking professional, wearing clothes that are appropriate
- Responsibility, integrity, dependability
- Respect for supervisors and co-workers
- Motivation and initiative
- Importance of interacting well with others
- Taking direction
- Open to learning

What do you see coming down the road in terms of the employment needs of NRV companies?

- In the next couple of years, it is going to be impossible to find laborers and other entry-level employees for construction, janitorial and jobs like that. Young people do not want to do that kind of work now. For us, the hardest positions to find now are maintenance, welders, and carpenters...
- It's so hard to find a brick mason now.

Recommendations to Goodwill for Training

- HR is very, very "busy". Any help that comes to you is welcome.
- A close partnership: so that the agency and employers become intimately familiar with each other's special needs and capabilities. The agencies can then find better fits for the employers, but also will know many of the details that could make a new employee's first few weeks much less stressful.
- This service of Goodwill needs to be marketed to employers, because they are not aware of it now.
- Goodwill needs to know a lot about the organizations they are trying to place with – understand the expectations of the organization.
- Teaching and coaching the hard and soft skills addressed previously in the discussion.
- Trainees need to come away with the understanding that even the most entry-level job still requires dedication, attention and diligence. Even if the job does not seem to be that important, employees need to have a respect for the job.