

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.

Report 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 Danville Area

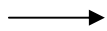
*What are the situations and challenges in the finding, interviewing, hiring and retention of your **entry-level employees** that give you the most headaches as HR Managers for your organizations?*

Challenges in recruiting and maintaining entry-level employees

- We've used Goodwill for Forklift training, and won't use someone on the forklift unless they are certified.
- If I could get one of them to completely fill out an application, it would make my day. If they can't take the time to completely fill it out then they're not going to take the time to do the job correctly. That's right off the bat – the first thing you look at!
- Their appearance when they come in for the interview; my father would have killed me! Tank top shorts and flip-flops are not appropriate attire for job interviews! This suggests disrespect for the company AND the interviewer.
- Attitudes too: I have asked people with bad attitudes to leave:
 - Attitude of **entitlement** – I'm entitled to this job; you owe it to me; because I showed up you should give it to me. I'm entitled to make a lot of money.
 - When criticized, one worker commented, "Well I didn't hire me!" – OR, "it's not my fault."
 - Attitude of not caring
- We turn away 50% of our applicants because they can't meet our skills set needs. They have to pass a typing test; they have to do a simulated customer service call; they have to demonstrate some type of customer service experience. Some people are not cut out to be customer service agents.
- They talk a real good game in interviews, but don't measure up either in abilities or willingness to work.
- When they don't know anything about how to do something (such as operate a cash register), and don't want to learn.
- Older workers have the work ethic that the younger generation does not have – they just don't have the skill set.
- The work ethic is a big problem. You always see them with their cell phones out texting, or you catch them on MySpace or YouTube when they should be working. Technology is making it worse rather than better.

These offenders were primarily younger (18-25) – there is a relatively large base of older applicants in Danville also – workers displaced from Dan River and other manufacturers

Mentioned statewide as a common problem



Either fear of change, or laziness

Shows lack of commitment

- Lack of importance of being at work on time, and calling out for many reasons: grandmother died, car broke down, etc. They need to find a way to get to work! I get so frustrated with that.
- One of our challenges is proper identification. They don't have their important ID documents such as SS card.
- Cell phones: We even put a sign up in our lobby saying please turn off your cell phones, and we can hear them ringing, or they cut it to vibrate, and they are constantly looking down to see who's calling them.
- They want to pick their work or their hours. If they don't get what they want, they'll walk out.
- You have people who work three days, then start calling in with excuses – family emergency, no transportation, etc.
- Drug and background checks are a big problem in this area – we lose a significant number of applicants, after we have gone through all the interviews and filled out all the forms.
- Financial management – we had a huge number of people quit last year right when they got their government tax refunds back.

This was mentioned more in Danville than in other areas.

Problem Areas

- Flexibility – they are hired for a specific shift or job and they suddenly decide they don't want to do that anymore.
- Peer Interaction – not enough respect among lower paid workers – they respect upper management, but not each other or their immediate supervisors
- Problem solving – you give them a task and have to walk them through it step by step by step, or it doesn't get done. I don't know whether it's because they don't have the ability to do it, or the self-motivation.
- A lot of the younger ones will not make a decision on their own
- Problem solving and communication

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

- Skill set for our call center – typing, keyboarding
- Basic customer service skills
- Communication skills
- Basic computer skills – surf the Internet, open programs at once and swap back and forth...
- Accounting skills, basic math (especially for retail)
- Being able to use computer technology and stay abreast of technology – even for applying for jobs
- Skilled trades are very hard to find (and getting harder)
- Accounting and bookkeeping skills
- Typing (or keyboarding)

Soft Skills – Coachable

- Work ethic
- Responsibility
- Customer service – how to deal with customers at a high level
- Punctuality – the importance of being there – at the time you are supposed to be there.
- Communication
- Pride in job; sense of urgency and importance in work
- Team building skills – being able to get along with the people you work with
- The importance of a stable work history; try to stay with jobs
- Core values

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

Many manufacturing jobs have been displaced over the past several years

- We have had so many displaced workers in this community – people have lost manufacturing jobs after several years of working for the same company.
- Very blue collar jobs and area; not much in the way of service jobs
- Danville had many of the same problems expressed in other areas of the state, but with more of a blue-collar setting. They have more of a manufacturing history, and many of the workers

Recommendations to Goodwill for Training

Mainly marketing recommendations

- Get the information out, make a brochure, sponsor a table at SHRM luncheons – make people aware of what you are doing! Use the Chamber (of Commerce) and really let people know.
- I had no idea! My experience with them in the past is that they have hired the mentally challenged or the handicapped.
- Showcase the successful training experiences in marketing materials