

## **P**urpose

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.

## **R**esearch 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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## 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.

## Overall Summary – Virginia Goodwill Network

***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?***

These are the problems that HR Managers frequently have with their entry-level employees. The problems start prior to the interview, and last well into the job if the employees are hired. Most of the managers agreed that if the employee can make it past the first six months, they have an excellent opportunity to grow with the organization and become a long-term employee. But a lot of these issues need to be addressed along the way, and many never make it.

Goodwill could perform an amazing service to employees and employers if they could address and correct just a few of these significant and costly problems for their client businesses.

The HR Managers also mentioned that several of their current employees could benefit tremendously from these sorts of classes or programs – so their interest would not be limited solely to candidates they are considering for their workforce.

### **Biggest Problems:**

- Lack of work ethic and all that this entails
  - Showing up on time every day and working as directed
  - Treating one's job as a priority and an opportunity
  - Commitment and dedication to the company and the job
  - Doing each task well, or to the best of one's ability
  - Reliability and dependability
  - Honesty and integrity
  - Maintaining a positive attitude
  - Productivity
  - Loyalty to company and job
  - Initiative and proactivity
  - Responsibility and accountability
  - Service ethic – to customers and fellow workers
  
- Lack of basic reading, writing and math skills
- Lack of basic communication skills – verbal and non-verbal
- Lack of basic computer skills and unwillingness to learn
- Lack of manners and common courtesy
- Personal financial problems – debt, garnishments, etc. Inability to manage finances or other life problems
- Lack of ability to handle life issues; family, transportation, getting along
- Cell phones at work and being distracted by personal issues

- Attitude of entitlement
- Negative attitude about company, job, coworkers
- Non accountability – not wanting to take responsibility
- Short-term attitude that this is a temporary job; no long term goals
- Lack of respect for job, supervisors and co-workers, and ultimately self
- Lack of respect for the company and its culture
- Inability to get along with peers and supervisors
- No concept of teamwork
- Not able or willing to follow directions or instructions
- Impact of negative attitudes upon the service ethic: internally or externally
- Lack of critical thinking and decision making skills
- Lack of flexibility – hours, days, job duties and ways of doing things; fear of change
- Hard, uncomfortable physical work creates high turnover
- Low pay jobs are easily replaced
- Employees who are so money centered they leave for another .25 per hour
- Misrepresentation of willingness or ability to get to work and do the job
- Non-disclosure of criminal history. Failing drug testing. Bad credit
- Attire: wearing unacceptable clothing to interviews or on the job
- Not open to new ideas or ways of doing things
- Not open to different cultures or backgrounds
- Not understanding boundaries of inappropriate behavior or discussions
- Untrained in how to apply for work – in presenting oneself favorably
- Caught in cycles of despair; no positive role models or modeling
- Expectations are too high regarding their pay, what they are worth, and the amount of control they have over what they do and when they do it
- Acting as if management is the enemy

***What is missing now? 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? What do they need to learn?***

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.

Interestingly, success in the development of hard skills could lead to confidence and development in the soft skills.

### **Hard Skills - Teachable**

- Basic math, spelling, language and grammar skills
- Basic literacy: reading and writing
- Basic communication: written, verbal and non-verbal
- Basic introduction to meeting people and interviewing: eye contact, firm handshake, focus upon the interviewer, elimination of distractions, such as gum, and cell phones; dressing for success
- Follow up: Notes and calls
- Time management and scheduling
- Basic job skills: accounting, mechanical, reading blueprints, fork lift operation, making change with a cash register, operating registers, calculators and other office equipment, reading charts, maps and tape measures, basic safety, business letters; housekeeping, cleaning
- Basic computer skills: hardware and software; keyboarding, email
- Basic workplace etiquette: telephone, dress, hygiene, customer service
- Diversity training
- Life skills: managing schedules, balancing a checkbook
- Critical thinking and problem solving
- English as a second language
- Training in the trades: plumbing, brick, carpentry, etc.
- Complete the employment application in its entirety; filling out tax forms and other job forms
- Penmanship and handwriting

**All of these were important, but the managers agreed that the soft skills development would be three things: more challenging, more helpful to the trainees, and ultimately more useful and profitable for the businesses.**

**Development of the hard skills and abilities could be a back door to the development of the soft skills these employees so desperately need.**

### **Soft Skills – Coachable**

- **Work ethic** – showing up every day, on time, ready to get the job done
- **Positive attitude**; win-win attitude
- **Dedication** and **commitment** to job; **perseverance**
- **Honesty** and **dependability**
- **Motivation**: to work, to learn and to grow
- Thinking **long term**; **goal** setting
- **Respecting authority** and following the rules
- **Respect** for self, supervisors and co-workers
- Respect for the **dignity of work**; **pride** in self and in job performance
- **Accountability** and **Responsibility**
- **Values** and **morality**
- **Getting along** well with others; being **approachable** and **personable**
- **Teamwork**
- Doing it **now** – not procrastinating
- **Flexibility** – the importance of doing what is necessary to get the job done
- **Loyalty**
- **Coping** with anger and frustration effectively
- **Self-motivation**
- **Open mindedness**: to change and new ideas
- **Self assessment** and **elimination** of bad habits and destructive attitudes
- **Tolerance** of differences in people
- Importance of **support network** – to help handle life challenges
- **Service ethic**; customer service skills
- Listening skills
- **Boundaries**: dress, conversation, reactions, teasing that is appropriate for work, and those that are not
- **Separation** of work and personal
- Importance of being **clean and well-groomed**
- **Investment** vs. immediate gratification
- **Financial management** and the importance of living within your means; goal setting and long-term

***Recommendations to Goodwill for Training – What can Goodwill do to put their trainees in the best possible position to succeed?***

- Develop and nurture the **soft skills** by training for the hard skills.
- Coach the trainees on what they need to do to GET the job, and what they need to do to KEEP the job.
- Focus upon **developing confidence and positive attitudes** first. If Goodwill can help the potential workers shake the negativity and develop a positive, can-do attitude, much of the job will be done.
- Consider a program for **current employees** as well as ones for applicants looking for a job. Many companies would pay for training of their current employees in areas such as peer interaction and personal financial management.
- **Partner** with organizations to develop training programs that are of specific value to them – that incorporate many of the particular skills needed on the job at that company.
- Help employers realize the **importance of mentoring and coaching** by supervisors and team leaders as a means of making new employees feel comfortable and a part of the team in their new jobs.
- Once the trainee is employed, job is half done. The employee needs to stay in the job for a year to have the best opportunity for long-term success. Continue to work with and mentor employees after they are employed to mark progress, prevent relapses and help the employees stay on track and move beyond entry-level.
- Develop success stories and use those as the centerpiece of the marketing and communication campaigns. Speak at SHRM and other HR functions. Inform managers of the mission and the results.
- Help trainees develop personal and professional goals and understand they are responsible for making these happen. Help them write a plan for getting there.
- Goodwill's **brand** will be judged by the success or failures of its trainees. Companies must believe in the brand – it has to stand for something. Take care before certifying that one has completed a training program, and be sure ample consideration is given to making a good fit between employer and applicant. Weed out those not really interested in working. Don't spin the capabilities of the employees as better than they are.

- Focus upon life skills as well as work skills – and the development of a support network for the inevitable challenges. Life skills and challenges are the biggest distractions for entry-level workers.