

## 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 Lynchburg/Campbell County 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***

**This was a problem statewide, and one that all of the focus groups wanted addressed in training.**

- The lack of work ethic – have no drive or motivation for work; no goals; no pride in themselves or in their work
- What entry-level employees don't know is ridiculous: basic math, words – and they lack the critical thinking ability to figure a lot of things out.
- Not being willing to come to work – it's amazing how some of them survive. They don't show up and then wonder why they don't get an increase.
- Drug use, and criminal backgrounds – we check everybody
- Loyalty, retention of employees. We have employees leave for another dollar an hour, but their benefits are getting slashed – it doesn't make sense.
- We can't get them through the interview process – I had one show up 30 minutes late for an interview the other day. They wear inappropriate attire, such as tank tops, ball caps and torn jeans; they could take a little more pride in their appearance.
- And sometimes their Mother will call asking for directions of how to get there for the interview.
- Applicants come to the interview but have no clue what it is that this company does.
- People misrepresent their capabilities and abilities – claim expertise they don't have.
- Poor attendance and lack of interest in the job – and it seems like the ones with the most ability are the ones that aren't interested in working. We aren't trying to hire experienced people anymore; we want to hire good people we can train to do the job. (Looking at a computer based testing module)
- Trashing past employers in interviews

**Participants were amazed that applicant could show up with such obvious disdain for their appearance.**

### ***Attracting and Keeping Employees – What are the problems?***

- Fear of Change – “that’s the way we have always done it.” (Especially with older employees)
- Critical thinking and problem solving – learning to think for themselves and take action based upon the overall goals
- Many of the problems may be traced to a lack of confidence on the part of the employee, and the fear of making a mistake. They tend not to try to figure something out on their own.
- Flexibility – Getting people to work on weekends, rainy days. People also want to pick their work; there are some jobs people are not willing to do.
- There are a lot of young people out there having babies that are not married – their financial obligations multiply, but they’re so immature. The **motivation** is just not there.
- Communication and critical thinking – they do things they should see are obviously wrong.

### ***Looking down the road, what changes do you see coming in the areas of HR that worry you? How are your needs or the market of employees going to change over the next five to ten years?***

Lynchburg seems to be a fairly competitive manufacturing market with a fair number of higher paying entry-level jobs.

- Getting the best workers will be even more competitive.
- Service industry will continue to grow – we’ll be needing more office workers
- The work/life balance keeps heading away from the work side and toward the life side. This can affect productivity and ultimately profitability.
- People will be working longer – past the 67-retirement age. They haven’t saved enough and can’t afford to retire yet.

**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**

- Stay away from drugs
- High school or GED
- Basic communication skills
- Preparation of a resume and apply for a job; knowledge to complete the application process
- Computer skills – Microsoft Windows
- Adaptability – be able to adapt to change
- Good grammar skills
- General math and reading skills
- Mechanical skills
- Blueprint reading
- Problem solving
- English - ESL

#### **Soft Skills – Coachable**

- Respectful, willing to answer questions in interviews
- Honesty
- People skills – being respectful and treat others the way you want to be treated
- **Appearance** –so they will look good applying for the job
- **Motivation**
- Positive demeanor
- Being prepared for the interview; interviewing skills
- Work ethic
- Interpersonal skills
- Attendance and punctuality; be on time every day
- Commitment and responsibility
- Attitude
- Being organized
- Not procrastinating

## ***Recommendations to Goodwill for Training***

- Teach the trainees to research the companies they are interviewing with and come with intelligent questions.
- The trainees need to be honest with employers – define what is their skill set; what they do well, and what they really are not interested in doing. Don't say what you think the employers want to hear.
- Teach applicants that when they are thinking about the job, to think long term and consider whether this is work they can spend a career doing. Teach them not to think short term.
- Role play to help trainees get ready for interviews; teach them how to interview and to complete an application
- Teach them how to manage money; this is a big problem for young families.
- Training in the hard skills and soft skills mentioned previously.