

## **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.

## **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 Richmond 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***

- Getting a lot of entry-level CNA's or students who don't know their designations – don't have proper documentation to work as a CNA. Inexperienced.
- The first “weeding out”? Filling out the application incompletely or incorrectly. Fake references or phone numbers. Being nonchalant about the application process – this suggests they will not take the job seriously too. “How can I trust you to do anything if you can't even fill out the application?” It's the (important) first step of the process.
- Grammatical or spelling errors in the application.
- Falsification of application: (lying about past convictions or other parts) causes an immediate rejection. And most companies will fire the employee after hiring them if the falsification comes to light. Applicants need to BE HONEST. “Just because you have a background doesn't exclude you from a job.” More important: “What have you done since that misstep? What have you done to improve your situation since then?”
- The people I see never had any training on how to (present yourself) for a job interview – such as what is appropriate dress. Short shorts and tank tops are not. It's amazing what people will wear! They come in looking like they just rolled out of bed. “Looking around the room (not making eye contact) and chewing gum make me think they really don't want to be there.” Applicants should wear nice dress slacks and a collared shirt for males, skirts or slacks for females: nothing low cut or revealing. No jeans or tank tops. “Look like you want a job!” Appearance is a sign of interest on their part, and a sign of respect for the employer.
- Money drives their motivation, and we can't compete for some of the higher wages paid to entry-level positions. Employees leave for another \$.25 per hour without regard to career possibilities.
- “Buy-in” at entry level; loyalty beyond the basic paycheck; they see it just as a job. Short-term thinking.
- Asking what the job pays at the beginning of the interview.

Sometimes it's carelessness – sometimes they don't know better

Importance of honesty and forward movement

A problem statewide – this suggests to the interviewer the applicant does not take the job seriously

A problem irrespective of education or abilities – part of the “entitlement” mentality

Entitlement again – a problem for employers statewide

Some employers also do this on the flip side: treating employees as if they are easily replaced.

- Younger crowd – their expectations are “seriously high” with respect to salaries and benefits – not realistic (even though they have no sense of career path)
- The job is “hard physical labor” – not an easy day at work. Finding people who are willing to do that kind of work and stick with it until they get a sense of career progression is hard.
- The attitude that they are “owed something”, not that they are coming in and they have to prove themselves worthy of the position. Answering their cell phone, or they call because they want to re-schedule the interview. They have no conception that “this is important and they are setting the standard here”.
- A lot of applicants with little education, less than high school, past history with drugs, criminal past.
- People working, but doing the bare minimum so that the government will assist them – “riding the system”. As soon as they get the job, we get the paperwork from Social Services.
- Acting as though management is working against them. (Part of this is management’s responsibility.)
- If the job is one where you can go somewhere else and get the same pay, they “don’t have a lot of respect” for the job. They move from job to job, feeling that if they lose a job it is easily replaced.
- No call no show – the day they are supposed to start work they have a family emergency

***Problems in Attracting and Keeping Employees***

Mentors and/or understanding supervisors really help retain employees

- **Motivation:** you can’t make somebody WANT to do something. It’s hard to determine whether they are self-motivating in an interview. A lot of the work is monotonous – and many aren’t motivated to do it. With many of them, after the first paycheck, they are gone.
- A lot of it is in the hands of management – they dictate the culture of the organization – with how connected and motivated the employees are. People want to know their work is appreciated.
- People need to see there is a way up – that they won’t always be able to make “more money selling drugs on the corner”.
- **Productivity** – they don’t like their jobs and it affects their performance, the quality of their work

Most of the participants believed that if the employee were motivated, many of these problems would disappear – can motivation be coached?

- **Communication** – don't communicate problems, when they are running late. Being unable to articulate thoughts and ideas and answers, inclusive of non-verbal and body language. Generally having a hard time understanding and being understood.
- **Interpersonal Skills** – getting along with others (related to communication skills). Eye contact, shaking hands.
- **Critical thinking** – entry-level don't have experience making decisions and don't want to be responsible for making them.
- Older applicants tend to have a better work ethic, plus they tend to acquit themselves better in interviews. Not as many issues; a different mentality. The only issue they may have is one of conservatism; fear of injury, and concerned about their own safety.
- **Positive Attitude** – not typical in entry-level jobs
- **Flexibility** – for companies that have longer working hours or multiple shifts, this can be a very large problem. Employees don't want to work certain hours (nights, weekends).
- **Problem solving and following instructions** – very important for a call center to follow strict instructions from their employer – some employees want to improvise.
- Being **open-minded** and ready to learn new ways to do things. Many employees are inflexible and want to stay within the realm of the uncomfortable.
- An attitude of **entitlement** – that the employees are entitled to the job, more money, and the freedom to set their own schedule or do things their own way. Kids don't understand that there are consequences when they don't do things the right way.

The blame for this attitude is leveled at the parents, who overprotect and have obsessed about positive self-esteem.

**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 math skills
- Cash handling
- Basic computer knowledge and familiarity; keyboarding
- Finance – how to create a budget, pay bills, balance a checkbook – things you have to do in your everyday life to run a household
- Reading and writing – basic functional literacy
- Reading a measuring tape (in fractions)
- Basic English for immigrants
- Basic telephone etiquette
- Problem solving skills
- Specific skills such as forklift operation, cooking or culinary skills
- Safety
- Basic reasoning ability

### Soft Skills – Coachable

- **Confidence** – in self and abilities
- Coach a sense of service and commitment rather than “entitlement”. This is a huge turnoff to employers and fellow workers
- Show up to work everyday on time
- Be nice to your co-workers
- **Customer service**: internal and external
- Presentation and **dress** code
- **Respect** – for fellow workers and company
- Applicants need to show up **on time** – “if you’re not 10 minutes early, you’re late!”
- Proper **interview etiquette** – prepare them for the sorts of questions that will be asked and help them with the answers; eye contact with interviewer; firm handshake and smiling
- In the interview, downplay the curiosity about what the job pays – asking that first suggests to the interviewer you are only in it for the money.
- Not bringing their children to the interview. This suggests childcare will be a problem.
- **Employment skills**: telephone etiquette, not having your BF/GF make your interview appointments; researching the company in advance, being nice to the receptionist
- When you leave a number for the employment office to call. Make the message sound professional – no loud blaring music
- **Follow-up** after the interview: phone call, handwritten note to say thank you. Call back if you are asked to by the interviewer.
- **Honesty** in the application process
- **People skills**: how to interact with different types of people (difference between work and home)
- Respect for authority figures in company
- Dropping **adversarial mentality**
- **Work ethic** – get up every day, show up on time and do a good day’s work
- Ability to deal with stress and disagreement on the job
- **Dependability**, ready to pitch in when needed
- Team player
- Appreciation of importance of work

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

- Lots of jobs available, but public transportation is terrible in Richmond. Jobs are moving away from the central downtown area, but many workers have no way to get there.

***Recommendations to Goodwill for Training***

- A lot of managers are not aware that Goodwill offers training at all. Goodwill needs to market itself and get out the word.
- Certification of training completed? Possibly helpful – but it needs to be something the companies can relate to and believe in – it has to stand for something real.
- Train employees in the areas covered under soft skills on the previous pages.
- Partner with employers to develop specific skills for certain jobs
- Weed out the folks that are not really interested in working – this will develop credibility for Goodwill as well as save time for employers
- Educational programs and training that develop confidence in trainees
- Train people in life skills – how to handle the problems that get in the way of job performance
- Employer Outreach Group – building relationships with employers. Employers know there is a need for these types of programs and training.
- Offer seminars in concert with employers – for current as well as prospective employees frequently have need of training in these areas.

**This will be part of Goodwill's branding effort – its trainees will be identified with the Goodwill program, as will any success or failure of that program.**