

## **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.

# Greater Roanoke 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***

- Just having the entry-level employees show up for work; attendance. Our biggest problem is them getting there, every day, on time, ready to work.
- Turnover: We have a tough time maintaining employees because of two things: the pay and the hour. One can work in many other jobs 9 – 5 for basically the same pay, and not have to work weekends.
- We have a hard time getting people who will come in at 6:00 AM. Other employees refuse to do tasks they seem to feel is beneath them for such a low wage.
- Our warehouse is hard physical labor - cold in the winter and hot in the summer. Many don't last. We have a real challenge with this.
- We have new hires that report for the first day, work half a day, go to lunch and never come back.
- We have employees who are gone working on road crews for long stretches of time, away from their home and families. This is hard for many of them.
- We have very little turnover at the upper levels, but we do with the entry-level employees who are mainly younger. We try to deal with this through reinforcement, and getting the employees assimilated as quickly as possible. Mentoring that is ongoing.
- Some employees see no problem with moving from job to job to job.
- Employees that do not have **basic** computer skills
- Lack of **basic** customer service skills – listening and either solving the problem or finding a person who can solve the problem
- People are willing to take a drug test, knowing they will fail it. (Costs employer)
- “Life gets in the way of work” – many people in the entry-level positions have complicated lives and family situations, and they have a hard time consistently showing up ready to work. Their personal lives cause them to have “difficulty with the basics”.

When jobs are plentiful and the pay is roughly the same, many employees with a short-term mentality will always seek the easiest job, in the best conditions. They have to learn this hurts them in the long run.

Mentoring to get the new employees “in the groove”.

A recurring theme statewide – people in entry-level positions are much more likely to let their personal lives interfere with their work lives.

Another statewide problem – declining work ethic deriving from a sense of entitlement



- **Entitlement** – they feel you owe them whatever they want to do – they want the freedom to make choices and have their employer just deal with it. They believe they are entitled to a paycheck regardless of the job they do.
- The **work ethic** is lacking: So many people today want to “work for 5 hours and be paid for 8 hours”
- “Kids today just don’t want to work – I had one bring his guitar in and carry it around. He said, what’s the big deal?” Another young receptionist was “at the front desk painting her toenails with her feet up on the desk right by the front door.”
- Many employers seemed to look at this question as one of **their** failing, as opposed to a failing of the employees. Then talked about how they need to bring new hires in and swiftly indoctrinate them to the culture of the organization. The most important person in this process is the immediate foreman or supervisor. The employees **MUST** connect with that supervisor.
- Many employees come in with a host of issues – personal financial problems, child support orders, and the like. They work for a while, and then garnishments or court orders catch up with them. All of this piles on them and creates stress for both the employer and employee.

In a lot of ways, this supervisor assumes the role of parent and provides instruction and direction the employee should have received growing up. In essence, the boss helps the employee grow up some more!



***What do great job candidates look like when they come in and apply for entry-level jobs?***

- They have references, a good job history, are concerned about their future, and are looking for success.
- Past stability; driving record is good. If the driving record is terrible it’s an indication they don’t respect the law or authority.
- An application that is completed, with all of the questions answered. They have kept it neat, not folded or dirty. You can look at the application and realize the person is literate. They get to the interview early, and they have good communication skills. They shake your hand, and can have a two-way conversation with you.
- I look for job stability, and sound reasons for leaving.
- Really short tenures with employers and sketchy reasons for leaving do not look good. “That makes me look at them and realize they probably aren’t going to be here long.” Employers want to spend their time and money on someone who is going to hang around for a while.

- First impressions: how they conduct themselves and the way they are dressed create a good first impression. Flip-flops don't cut it.
- Good applicants understand there are rules and guidelines that must be followed. Every company has these.

**Problems with entry-level Employees – What is Important?**

Most participants agreed that the most important quality a new entry-level hire could bring to the job was a positive attitude. The best way to train for this? Put the new hires around positive people.

- **Critical Thinking** – many entry-level employees don't have the problem solving skill set.
- **Problem solving** – this sort of thing is just not in their background.
- **Productivity** – no sense of efficiency – getting done what they have to get done within a reasonable time frame.
- **Positive Attitude**—Some people really struggle to “get it”, but if they have a great attitude, we work with them. Attitude can make you keep someone on who is marginal.
- **Following Directions** - but there are a lot of people who “all they can do is follow directions – can't think for themselves.”
- **Motivation** – some people just don't want to work, or they want to do just enough to get by. If people are motivated to be a good employee or to do well, many of the problems with tardiness or slacking on the job go away.
- “We're looking for people who CAN do the job, and who WILL do the job. With entry-level positions, it's not usually that they can't do it. It's that they won't. I would take someone with a great attitude any day over someone with more qualifications who had a poor attitude.”

They want people who are (self) motivated to do a good job – motivated to do well for themselves

**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 computer skills; keyboard entry
- Technology savvy – familiar with those automated things that are a part of our world: scanners, email, etc.
- Basic telephone skills (for customer service)
- Basic schooling: math, (proper) English
- English as second language
- Being organized in your work; neat
- Multi-tasking skills
- Consistency – follow through for each job
- Basic skills for the position (construction, such as masonry, carpentry, etc.)
- Hygiene and cleanliness
- Driving skills – no excessive violations or infractions
- PDA skills – smart phones, etc.
- Basic mechanical

### **Soft Skills – Coachable but a little harder and more time intensive to learn**

- Basic work ethic skills
- Dedication to work
- Commitment to work
- Importance of loyalty
- Personal planning skills – want someone who can plan their personal life so that they CAN work
- Ability to see things from another’s perspective – to understand when the boss is telling something
- To bring a win-win-attitude to work
- Accountability and Responsibility for their actions and decisions
- Motivation to learn
- Desire to make money – personal satisfaction with making money and doing a job well
- Personal goals – short term and long term (then they are motivated to come to work)
- Teach them the perils of moving from job to job – the rewards of commitment and perseverance
- Working as a team member
- Honesty
- Communication – well-spoken and proper grammar
- Problem solving
- Dependability
- Tolerance – respecting other people’s differences
- Punctuality
- Family crisis management skills
- Able to follow instructions
- Attention to detail
- Following rules and company guidelines
- Respect for selves and others
- Getting past the “derelict or smartass mentality”
- Stop living for the weekend or Friday night
- Keeping temper in check – “don’t need objects flying across the floor”
- Teaching them to get their personal problems under control
- **Creation of internal support network to go to if they need help with a problem**

## Recommendations to Goodwill for Training

- Focus on developing the soft skills from the previous pages – employers can and will teach employees the elements of the jobs.
- “I think the thing that would help me the most would be for the referral source NOT to send me the people they know have these (soft skill) problems.”
- Spinning the candidates as much better than they really are is “the quickest way for me NOT to take any more referrals from that person.”
- Learn as much as you can about the person needing the job, and then try to place them in the best possible position that suits their needs and abilities.
- Companies need to do a better job of bringing the new employees into the fold with a mentor or someone the new employee can go to with questions or problems. This would tremendously facilitate the new employee’s orientation and feeling of being welcomed.
- Companies need to assume some of the responsibility for the attitudes of their employees about their work. They need to help employees maintain the **positive attitude** that is so important.
- Goodwill needs to develop a plan with the employer – together to train people in learning certain skills. Work with employers to **customize** an approach to the training. They would like to have it be a team effort on the part of Goodwill and the employers – a partnership.
- Goodwill needs to get out the word with respect to its training, to let employers know about its training programs. Then, Goodwill needs to develop relationships with the employers based upon a common understanding of each other’s needs.
- Continue to coach and teach once the employee has the new job, to mark progress, prevent relapses, and encourage employees to move beyond entry-level.
- Maintain the connection with the employees – to provide counsel if needed, and to be a resource to the employers.

This was some of the best information to come from the groups – the companies that have the least trouble with new hires are those that assume a strong responsibility for helping them to feel a part of the team.

This was one of the few markets in which the participants recommended continuing to work with trainees following their hiring – but it was a good idea!