

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.

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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 Harrisonburg/Staunton 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

Turnover is a big problem in Staunton and Harrisonburg, and apparently the market is competitive for entry-level part-time workers.

- Turnover – it's not easy work, and there are shifts around the clock
- Turnover in our part time work force – again, it's hard work, standing on concrete, using water, and in the elements.
- A lot of employees don't want to work nights or weekends like you have to in retail, and the pay is low for our entry-level jobs. They'll go down the street for another quarter.
- The problems we have are more life skills – our employees do foolish things on the job, horseplay, and inappropriate comments. A lot of times they don't realize what they have. It really helps when they buddy up with a lead custodian who can show them the ropes. The critical period is that first six months to a year.
- We require everyone to submit an application online, and that may be a deterrent for those who are not familiar with computers.
- We have had people lose their jobs because they have falsified information on the application about their criminal history, and if they had just disclosed it wouldn't have been a problem. They need to be honest!
- We have zero tolerance for non-disclosures on applications – and because we do a background check we will always find out about it.
- In the interview, the applicants sometimes wear heavy perfume or cologne.
- Sincerity, honesty and friendliness go a long way – and **eagerness** to get the job – really wanting the position. A positive attitude that they can do the job.
- Attire – whatever they thought was appropriate, take it up one notch. They don't have to wear ties but looking nice would really help. It's amazing how casual people will come to interviews; they at least need to wear nice khaki pants and a shirt with a collar. And shoes instead of flip-flops.
- And when applying for the job, don't come in with a huge list of dates and issues and conditions that must be worked around.

Honesty and full disclosure of background are paramount and indicative of the applicant's current character.

This shows to the interviewer how seriously they are taking the interview and the opportunity.

Very well expressed issue of declining service ethic and the culture of “self”

- Eye contact: look at me when you talk to me (suggestive of sincerity)
- Work ethic: is lacking in many of the new hires – doing a good job, and wanting to do a good job. WE have people who need constant supervision.
- Discretionary effort: going above and beyond to do a good job.
- We have seen some erosion of the service ethic – which is going to make it harder to fill entry-level positions. I think in today’s contemporary culture, we don’t have that sense of wanting to “serve”.
- The average commute to JMU is 30 miles; we attract from all over, and the gas prices are hurting a lot of people.
- And technology will only increase – it’s not going away. This could leave to greater divides between those who are educated and those who are not – the haves and the have-nots.

Entry-level employees: What are your biggest problems?

Very similar to those expressed in other markets

- Communication
- Productivity – older work force does not move as quickly as we need them to move
- Motivation – more and more I see motivation decreasing: people doing just what they need to get by.
- Communication – people are not interacting productively with each other
- Flexibility – employees who just do not want to do something differently – they don’t want change!
- Peer interaction – inability to communicate effectively and to get along

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

- Reading and writing skills; basic language and math skills
- Conflict resolution
- Basic computer skills; hardware and software
- Respect for peers and authority
- Second language
- Teamwork
- Sharing
- Counting money, money management
- Public speaking

Soft Skills – Coachable

- Work ethic – being paid to do a job – so do it, take pride and do it well.
- Respect for authority
- Boundaries in the workplace for conversation and behavior
- Positive attitude
- How to present themselves in an interview
- Workplace behavior
- Conflict resolution – appropriate and inappropriate – between peers, supervisor and worker; treat other people as you would like to be treated; Golden Rule
- Basic manners
- How to handle anger appropriately and constructively
- Personal hygiene
- Honesty, trustworthiness, sincerity and integrity
- Strength and productivity enhancement with diversity
- Communication – ability to express themselves in a proper way
- Help employees be mentally prepared to come to work and succeed – to appreciate the opportunity
- Interpersonal skills
- Life skills: money management, manners, common sense issues; knowing when to say things and when not to say things; the way to dress; listening
- Substance abuse (as parents should have done)

Recommendations to Goodwill for Training

- Really work on developing the soft skills outlined in the previous section.
- Role-playing would be the most effective training tool Goodwill could use – or somehow to put what they have learned into practice.
- Give trainees the opportunity to assess and correct their weaknesses – to say what they need to be trained upon.
- Legal help would be a huge issue for them – they need legal consultation all the time.
- Intergenerational issues and conflict, and ways to deal with it.
- Language – communication between people who speak different first language – this will be a bigger challenge as the Hispanic population grows
- Listening – and trying to understand where people are coming from
- Money skills – and how to live most frugally on the lowest of wages