



## 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 Hampton Roads/Tidewater 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?***

A problem in Tidewater and DC Metro where there are a number of government contractors and vendors

- Finding people with security clearance (don't hire typical low-level entry positions)
- Finding people who are dependable, there every day, and don't call in or just take off (without calling)
- Finding people that are able to communicate well – and speak clearly (articulation, and knowing what to say)

A “generational” challenge – more of a problem with younger employees; the older generation believes it was more work-oriented.

- Finding people who are responsible and accountable for their time (come to a training class without fail for new employees)
- Candidates coming in who are not prepared for an interview. (Not aware “good” interview answers, how to present themselves, inappropriate responses to questions)
- Candidates with poor telephone skills that cannot get past the telephone interview and be invited for an in-person interview.
- Candidates not filling out the application correctly or completely; “if they can't do this I don't hire them.” Lying on the application
- “We're talking about people who for the most part have dropped out of high school, and they don't have that “direction” yet.” They have never really had a job before.
- They come in dressed poorly or inappropriately, and frequently call in sick.
- After a few days, they start wanting their check. And when they get it, you never see them again.
- “They don't see the job as an opportunity to better themselves”. Lack of commitment. Immaturity.
- Dependability is a big problem, and that goes hand-in-hand with commitment.



- Candidates with body language that suggests they think they are too cool or too good for the job.

### **Challenges in recruiting and maintaining entry-level employees**

Lack of structure in their home environment was a recurring theme across the state as participants were considering the challenges of finding and keeping entry-level employees

- Lack of positive role models. They come from home where there is a single parent, or Mom and Dad are out. There is not enough **structure** in the household. The kids aren't made to follow the rules or do their homework. It's a cycle where kids aren't getting the attention they need.
- One of the problems is that a lot of parents do not hold their children **accountable**. (This was mentioned irrespective of socio-economic class.)
- **Technology** is leaving some people behind. Many jobs take applications only online, which means that unwired people will never get to apply. Others, because they are not familiar with computers and how to use them, are unable to take advantages of the opportunities to educate themselves before an interview about the company.
- Generation Y is a "skeptical generation". Many of them are very wired, are used to immediate gratification, and have been entertained their whole lives with video or the Internet. As a result, they aren't prepared to face the eventuality of hard physical work, or jobs that demand adherence to a schedule. They want to be able to keep their cell phones with them all the time.
- There are *more entry-level jobs than there are people to fill them*, so it's a seller's market now. Employers who need employees can't just get rid of the slow/poor performers.

In many ways, it's a Tale of Two Markets: one is wired, and the other is not. Both present unique challenges.

### **Brainstorming Exercise: Employability Skills**

*When you think of employability skills, what sort of things come to mind?*

Huge →

- **Pleasant attitude** – cooperative, positive (determined from behavioral questions and the way they present themselves); positive body language
- **Appearance** – denote cultural or age barriers (flip flops, long dirty hair, unshaven, shirt-tail out, baggy pants, multiple piercings, etc.) first impression is huge and can automatically exclude an applicant. They should be NEAT. ("Approach it like you are in business selling yourself")
- No barrier crimes (violence, or felonies)
- **Motivated** to learn
- **Work ethic**
- Look like you **WANT** to be there

↑ Many young people today do not get this – they think they should be able to wear whatever they want because it is the way they express who they are. They don't understand that employers don't care about that – and that this individuality is something employers want to avoid.



- Come to interview **prepared**
- Come to interview **on time**
- **Eye-contact** during interview; firm handshake
- Willing to **take direction**
- **Communication** skills
- **Respect** for interviewer and employer
- Social and Interpersonal skills – **getting along** with others (problem especially among males)
- Ability to **resolve disagreements** constructively; not confrontational
- Attention to **detail**
- Buy-in to company culture
- **Knowledge** of employer or company
- **Self-assured; confident** (without being cocky or smug)
- Letting interviewer know they are interested in the job,
- Ask when they expect to make a decision
- **Pride** – that will result in pride in themselves and the job they do for the company

#### ***Brainstorming Exercise: Work Ethic***

- If you're being paid for 8 hours you work for 8 hours – even being proactive about finding things to do.
- NOT – playing on the Internet or talking on your cell phone
- Understanding you're a “smaller piece of the whole” – you represent your company, so do it well and thoughtfully
- Team effort: being able to work with a team
- Good attitude – no disrespect or abusive language; no anger
- Conscientious about their work and their job
- Honest and reliable – do what they say they are going to do
- Dependable – you know they will get the job done
- Ask questions if they are not sure
- Appropriate attire
- They “want it” – the job, and the feeling of doing it well



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

- The most consistent problems were in the areas of **problem solving, critical thinking and communication** – and this was true across the state as well as in Tidewater. Communication is an issue deriving from different languages, different cultures and varying socio-economic classes, and has to do with both willingness and ability to communicate. Employers are finding entry-level employees severely lacking in these areas.
- Employers are also having a great deal of difficulty finding potential employees with a **positive attitude** – they believe that a positive attitude can go a long way toward solving many of the other potential problem areas. They recognize that the cause of this is “low self-worth”, and see the solution as coming from training.
- Same with **motivation** – “if you have motivation, everything else falls into place”.
- There were also some problems with “**flexibility**” – with employees not willing to do certain jobs or work certain hours. They refuse to report early when necessary, or to work the second shift.



***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 arithmetic – add and subtract
- Calculator skills – being able to count money and count back change
- Read – (words, charts and maps) Reading comprehension
- Telephone Etiquette; front desk skills
- Computer skills – hardware, MS office
- Customer service skills
- Email communications – (nuances of implication)
- Spelling, language, grammar
- How to interview/Effective resumes
- Basic safety skills
- Accounting
- Overall communication
- Business letters
- Workplace etiquette – dress, timeliness, problem solving
- Specific skills: operating certain machines, cleaning floors, carpets, baths, forklift, lawn care

### **Soft Skills – Coachable**

- Coping skills – with angry customers, coworkers, frustration
- Diversity training: accepting people
- Communication skills – and body language
- Open minded – to new ideas and new things – willingness to learn
- Personal hygiene
- Self-motivation
- Commitment
- Handling life’s challenges
- Respect – for self, company, co-workers and supervisors
- Teamwork; being a team player
- Dress for success
- Importance of punctuality
- Approachable and personable on the job
- Workplace etiquette
- Life challenges – how to handle
- Internal and External customer service
- Timeliness
- Critical thinking/problem solving
- Losing destructive attitudes: “entitlement”, “just a job”, and “just getting by”, or “calling the shots”, “10 minutes late doesn’t really matter”
- Teaching the skills needed to get comfortable in a new environment
- Stress management – how to handle the day to day issues
- Taking responsibility - accountability



***What makes Hampton Roads/Tidewater different and unique from other areas of Virginia with respect to the needs of employers and employees?***

- Military
- Very **transient** area, meaning there is a lot of turnover in jobs (from spouses and children of military active duty)
- Lower pay than other areas; military drives wages down
- Large pool of people chasing only a few jobs
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***Recommendations to Goodwill for Training***

- What kind of people are they looking for, and what kind of training are they doing? People want to hear the story and determine how they and Goodwill might work together. Right now awareness of Goodwill's training mission is very low. They would like to see a clear statement of mission.
- Market what they are doing to *build confidence in their ability to train* people successfully – (We would be very skittish about hiring someone with a criminal record.)
- Training and coaching specifically for interviews. Teach applicants the importance of eye contact, firm handshakes and body language and how it can for them or against them in interviews. Show them the correct body language to use in interviews.
- **Mentoring** program: one that runs through the first few months of a trainees new job
- Train them on *how to act in the workplace* – what behavior, attire, conversation is appropriate and what is not.
- Be honest about the strengths and weakness and abilities and limitations of applicants
- Do assessment tests and build the strengths of applicants

