

STRATEGIC STAFFING PROCESS: A Holistic Approach to Better Organizational Results

By Wayne Outlaw

In the past, many companies felt there was an ample labor pool to provide an unending supply of employees for their human capital needs. Owners and managers believed that even if employees left, they simply placed an ad in the newspaper and easily filled the position. Even if this was true in the past, it will not be in the future. Between now and the year 2005, the reduction of workers entering the workforce will increase the number of jobs that go unfilled. In certain positions such as entry level and some highly skilled or high-tech jobs the labor situation will be even more critical.

The effort and investment required to hire, train, and develop a top performing sales, technical, or administrative employee is significant, and it dramatically impacts the bottom line. The more wages increase and the more the business technology company demands highly skilled workers, the more effort and expense it will take to fill a job. Because of this, it is no wonder top management is paying more attention to the acquisition and retention of employees.

Because of the scarcity of candidates, the cost of hiring, and the cost of turnover, many organizations are taking a significantly different and innovative approach to staffing. No longer is staffing separate or unconnected from the organization's strategic business objectives. Executives realize that just as getting customers, retaining customers, establishing product superiority, or creating marketplace dominance is important, having the organization fully staffed with capable, talented, and experienced individuals is of critical importance, and is one of their strategic objectives. Staffing is now considered a key element of the business planning of innovative organizations.

In the 1990's, for the first time, companies acquired other companies not for products, technology, customer base, or even market share, but for their employees. The capability of their employees was the key asset considered in the decision to buy the company.

The companies that realize the importance of staffing know they cannot reach their objectives by simply focusing on one or two elements, such as recruiting, and ignoring the quality of the employee hired and its effect on training and managing. Increasing employee retention will reduce the need to hire, but unavoidable attrition, growth, and the need to increase skill levels require continuous recruiting.

Staffing is now being approached in a holistic manner by progressive organizations. Executives realize hiring talented people is fruitless unless employee needs are developed, employees are rewarded for their efforts, and, like all precious assets, are retained. They also realize the quality of the individual hired and level of "fit" between the individual and the particular job will determine the difficulty of effort required to develop, reward, and retain. Considering only one or two elements of this strategic objective alone is foolhardy because each is interrelated. One affects the other. The better one is done the easier the others will become.

If this innovative approach increases success, you are probably asking, "How can we do it in our organization?" The first step in changing is to strongly declare the importance and need for change. For staffing to be strategic requires it be identified as a business objective and elevated with other

critical organizational and business objectives. It doesn't do any good to make the "right" statements in literature, or distribute memos or send e-mail declaring the importance of staffing, and yet spend the time during staff meetings talking about sales results and service objectives only to offhandedly ask about staffing with a question such as, "How are we doing on getting our positions filled?" You wouldn't ask offhandedly how you are doing on sales and not take the answer seriously because you know it is key to survival and success. The same is true with staffing.

By shifting the order and priority of staffing to the forefront, organizations can ensure they have staff to make sales, to achieve response time targets, and satisfy customers. In short, to elevate staffing to a strategic level requires real, concrete action, not just lip service. In some organizations shifting the priority of staffing to the forefront may require a change in mission, objectives, personnel and even management structure. What will you do to ensure you have the staff needed to get and keep customers?

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