

ADVICE FROM THE FIELD

If the '90s were technology, then the '00s are for more gold watches

My grandfather was given a gold watch. He worked for the city of Dearborn for over 40 years. What will be interesting is what my wife's uncle will receive. He started at Ford when he was 14 and, at 80, he hasn't retired yet. In contrast, most of my friends will not receive gold watches. Working for the same company for 25 years is rare today. That has to change. If the '90s were technology, then the '00s has to be the start for more gold watches.

Technology has rapidly changed the business climate. Even small businesses are being affected by this global economy. Nevertheless, one thing hasn't changed: A company's workforce will grow and shrink but its need for talent will never waver. Disposable labor is bad business.

Downsizing is coming back

The warning signs are all there. Every day, a company announces an imminent layoff. Very few upper managers realize that this quick fix is an indication of their failure as leaders. Their biggest mistake is not to have vision. Reducing labor is a solution similar to cutting off your right leg to lose weight. If they had hired the right people and had put trust in their performance, then downsizing would not have been an option. We need to promote the gold watch mentality.

In all of the hiring seminars I have conducted, everyone has agreed that a company's best asset is its people. Oddly enough, nobody has ever believed that his/her company practiced that philosophy! Yet, many companies will spend a considerably amount of time putting together mission statements. Almost all will contain something about customers. Regrettably, many fail

to recognize the importance of its own people within those same statements. What is even sadder is that some of the very people, who should know better, do not recognize another crucial aspect. At the last seminar, a slide with 20 company functions such as Purchasing, Quality Control, etc was used to discover this awful truth. As we went around the room, everyone was asked on how he/she would rank "hiring" as it relates to these other tasks. This room full of HR personnel on the average ranked "hiring" fourth. What they failed to recognize is that the success of any company function depends on having talented individuals. Therefore, since people are a company's best asset then how you get them has to be a company's number one priority! Today's hiring is tomorrow's success.

OK, wiseguy, what's the answer?

This very complicated problem has two aspects—hiring and retaining. Initially, one must recognize the importance of people so maybe we need a new set of mantras.

Maybe we should start a campaign where everyone starts his/her day by repeating the company's mantra. Words can lead to action. We want the gold watch mentality. Hiring and retaining are the Siamese twins; one cannot live without the other. Start by making not the customer king, but the employee king. The customer is not always right. A lost customer is not as tragic as losing a respected employee. However, never use a counteroffer to correct a "retaining" mistake. It seldom works and the employee will leave anyway within a year.

Almost all of us would like to lose some weight. If we were serious, our plan would include some outside help. However, if we did enough research, we could become experts and do it ourselves. Unfortunately, in the employment area, companies do not have that choice. Even so, caution must be used when seeking an "expert" in this field. Many are still selling "lipstick on a pig" solutions. It might look better but it is still a pig.

ISO-9000 is the good news

Good hiring and retaining programs are very similar to the ISO-9000 Quality Certification process. Therefore, having a certification already is a good sign. However, is the intent present? If your company would not lose any business, would it immediately stop performing the ISO-9000 requirements? Only a very emphatic "no" means your company is ready to be the premier business in your field.

For example, our Performance Hiring Program takes an ISO-9000 approach but with one major difference. The ISO-9000 process is an all or none program; a company does not have any choice on what it will adapt. The Performance Hiring Program gives some leeway in that it is modular. The key of course is to find a program that will fit the needs of a company. On the other hand, any program that tells you what has to be done but misses the "how" is not worth the effort. Just about everybody can tell you to diet and exercise to lose weight. The fitness expert outlines the specifics.

In the "retaining" arena, two programs come to mind. Rydin & Associates of Troy take the ISO-9000 process way beyond the paper requirements. The focus is to use it as an advantage to grow a company dramatically. People play an important role. The other program is Don Vlcek & Associates of Plymouth. They have series of programs to improve retention; each is a systematic approach that involves people as the essential element.

Rewarding loyal employees with a gold watch for 25 years of service is not a thing of the past but one of the future. Technology may change how we do business but the critical element will always be people. The company that has an active, organized, and structured system to find, hire, and retain talented individuals will be the most successful.

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The 10 Company Mandates

1. A company does not start with an idea, thought, or a product; it starts with a person.
2. Without good people, a company cannot be good.
3. Today's hiring determines tomorrow's success.
4. A company has a name but its people give it meaning.
5. A company cannot accomplish anything without a person being involved.
6. There is no better return on investment than hiring a talented employee.
7. Company loyalty cannot be bought, but can be earned through recognition and involvement.
8. The key to a successful hiring program is to seek eagles, accept maintainers, but avoid slugs.
9. It does not matter what direction, products or growth a company plans, the critical resource will be people.
10. The size of company's workforce will grow and shrink but the need for talent will never waver.