

# Workplace Enhancement Notes

A Tip Sheet for Organizational Leaders & Managers

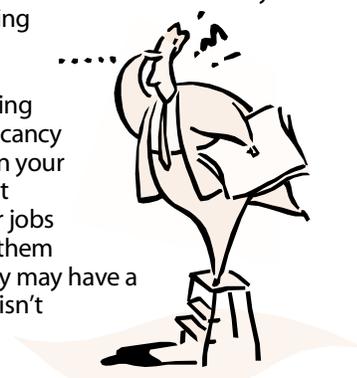
Volume 9, Issue 1

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## Attracting & Hiring the BEST Employees!

**Y**ou know the challenge in front of you: with lots of choices for the average job seeker, it's getting harder and harder to both attract and hang onto the best workers. You've tried the want ads, you've attended job fairs, and you've even tried the bulletin board at the local Laundromat. You still have a problem getting people to even think about working for you. The bad news is that hiring people is more of an art than a science (there isn't one "right" way), the good news is that there are a wide variety of things you can do to increase your odds at making the right hiring decisions. And it begins even before you have a job to fill.

**Hang onto your good workers.** The best place to start in keeping your company fully staffed is to ensure that you don't have a vacancy to begin with. All of the things you need to do to fill a vacancy in your company are a lot more expensive than simply making sure that those who work for you stay working for you. People leave their jobs for a variety of reasons. Some leave involuntarily—you've fired them or put pressure on them to leave. Others leave voluntarily—they may have a better offer someplace else, they don't like their job, or the pay isn't adequate. The most effective strategy for keeping the best people working for you is to give them reasons to stay with your company. This means paying attention to the work environment, career opportunities, and rewards for great performance. It means investing in building each employee's commitment to your company. If you don't invest here, you'll end up paying handsomely in high turnover, expensive recruitment efforts, and retraining.



But when and if you do need to hire—whether due to turnover or growth in your

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## Say "Hello" to Exit Interviews

**W**hy do employees decide to leave your company? What causes some of your staff to walk out your door and across the street to work for someone else — perhaps even your competition? Why is it important for you to know the answers to these questions?

When used in the right way, exit interviews with employees who quit your organization can help you find answers to these critical questions. The exit interview — a brief, structured discussion with each departing employee — helps you identify the reasons an employee has decided to leave. The results from a number of exit interviews can then help guide you in developing strategies for improving employee morale and reducing turnover.

Conducting an exit interview is a good business strategy. It helps you determine if the departing employee is leaving due to circumstances that you *may* have some control over (such as working conditions, quality of supervision, pay, training and development opportunities, co-worker relationships, etc.) vs. circumstances that you may have little control over (such as change in family situation, spouse getting an out-of-town job, unrealistic job expectations, a change-averse personality, etc.).

To gain these benefits and insights, however, your exit interview process must be systematic

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### Read this Issue to . . .

- Know how to hire right!
- Prepare for an exit interview with departing employees
- Know how to download RCI White Papers on key organizational issues

## Hiring the BEST, contd.

company—there are some important steps you must take to ensure that your investment in recruiting and hiring returns healthy dividends.

**Step One — Decide what kind of company you want to build.** Before bringing people into your company, you must first decide what kind of company you want. You need to be clear about your company's purpose and vision. This essential first step in the recruitment and selection process isn't a fad or buzzword; it is a critical step that helps you decide who you want to invite into your company to help you create the value for which customers will pay. This step achieves two important objectives for you: the first is that it will help you choose people who will positively shape the customers' experience and contribute value to the company. The second is that the vision communicates to prospective job candidates what you stand for, what your company is trying to achieve for its employees, its customers, and even for the community. When you define your company vision, you clarify for yourself and others the goals, values, and beliefs that distinguish your company from all the others. This might make the difference in attracting people who aspire to the same goals and beliefs as you.

**Step Two — Identify how a person working in the vacant position creates value for the company.** Drawing upon the company vision and its supporting beliefs, this step defines a strong link between the purpose of the company and how this specific position benefits the company. When you announce to the world that you have a job vacancy, you want to be able to communicate the critical role this position plays in the company. Whether this job involves taking customer calls, grooming pets, running an injection-molding machine, or bussing dirty dishes, you must let people know the value that this position brings to the company and its customers. As with step one, this step can also be helpful in attracting prospective candidates because it makes every job important.

**Step Three — List the benefits and rewards that will come to those who do this job well.** People will choose to work for you for a variety of reasons. It may be the pay you offer, the kind of work you provide, the opportunities available for skill development or job advancement, or something as simple as your location. What you have to offer won't appeal to everyone, but then you're not looking for just anyone; you're looking for someone who will help create value in a certain way for the company and its customers. Help prospective job candidates choose your company by letting them know up front what job success will mean to them. Be clear and be specific, but don't stretch the truth. Give people a reason to choose your company over others.



**Step Four — Define the critical knowledge, skills, and abilities that a job candidate will need in order to be successful in the job.** When you look at your job candidates, you will need to examine each to determine if he or she has what it takes to get the job done and to create the value for the company that you defined in step two. Make a list of the behaviors, skills, abilities, and knowledge that most contribute to success in the job. Talk to those who have done the job well in the past or who are doing it well now. Find out what the customers value the most. Create a profile that defines the competencies that your ideal candidate should have. While you may not find any person that completely meets the profile, it at least gives you a clear target to shoot for.

**Step Five — Get the word out.** With a clear company purpose, a clear definition of how a vacancy contributes to this purpose, a well-defined list of benefits and rewards that follow job success, and an understandable list of the knowledge and skills that you're looking for, you can now let others know that you're in the market for someone who will help your company. Recruitment isn't easy in this labor market. People have lots of employment choices and they will freely and gladly exercise them. But at least you've made it clear to yourself and others what you're looking for.

In this step, be creative. Want ads work for some jobs, but, in reality, the best place to fill many vacancies is through the informal "friends and family" network and through professional and fraternal associations. This means asking your best employees to be your recruiters (another reason to build a positive work environment). It means approaching people who you see doing good work

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Decide what kind  
of company you  
want to build . . .  
And then hire the  
people who can  
make this happen!

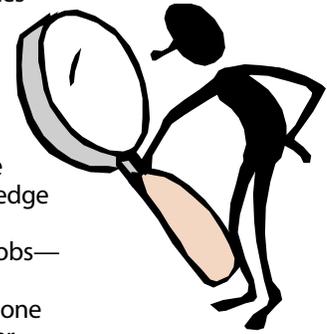
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Call **Russell  
Consulting** today to  
explore ways to help  
you "hire right" and  
retain the best people

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for others and asking them to give you a call. It means finding out where prospective candidates socialize, what magazines or newspapers they read, what radio stations they listen to, or what groups they belong to. Being a good recruiter requires that you do your homework.

**Step Six — Use a variety of methods for screening and selecting job candidates.** While sorting through and then selecting the best of your job candidates is more art than science, there are some things you can do to improve your success in selecting the right person for the job. Use a combination of techniques to discover the candidates who fulfill most of the knowledge and skill requirements that you've set for the position. Some of the most promising include behavior-based interviews—which focus on a candidate's behavior and performance in *past* jobs—and job tryouts or "in-basket" exercises that give the candidate real work to do and that demonstrate their *applied* knowledge and ability. An extended job tryout can most easily be done through a temporary employment agency, but expect to pay a finder's fee. Such a fee, however, pays for itself when you see the tryout candidate doing the right things on the job.



**Step Seven — Hang on to your good people and don't stop recruiting.** This step brings us around to where this article began. You'll spend less time and money recruiting and selecting employees if you hang on to those good people who work for you now. Do whatever it takes to give your current employees a reason to stay working with you.

## Exit Interviews, continued from page 1

and well-designed. While you don't need to be a researcher or human resource practitioner, there are some fundamental principles that should form the basis of your exit interview system.

1. **Structure the Interview:** The exit interview should be comprised of a set of standard questions that you ask all departing employees. These questions should address key areas such as: job orientation and training, ongoing job support, supervision; the work itself; pay and benefits; co-worker relationships; and company rules policies. These questions should generally be open-ended questions to allow employees to respond using their own words. Try to keep your exit interview relatively short (a couple of pages) and try to limit the interview to 30 minutes. The goal is discover the *cause* of the employee's quitting and to learn ideas for reducing the likelihood that others will leave. The interview can be conducted via the telephone if this is more convenient for the departing employee.
2. **Interview Conducted by Someone Outside the Work Area:** Ideally, it is best to select someone from outside the departing employee's work area to conduct the interview. This could be someone from human resources or a manager from a different work area. Whoever you choose, you want the employee to feel comfortable in speaking freely, without fear of potential future retaliation. While you shouldn't promise the exiting employee confidentiality (you may need to share information with others in order to develop an improvement plan), you do want to assure the employee that his or her answers will only be used to improve the company's work environment.
3. **Use it with All Exiting Employees:** Once you develop your system, do your best to ensure that all exiting employees are given an interview before they leave. Don't just talk to those who you know will have good things to say. Some departing employees may refuse to participate. Given their desire to leave employment, there's not much you can do about this — other than try to convince the employee that you value their ideas and opinions.
4. **Compile the Interview Data and Look for Trends:** It's critical that you gather data from several interviews before you start making changes in your operations. You are trying to discover trends and themes that surface from the interviews. Remember, the focus should be on discovering the underlying *causes*, not assigning blame. Exceptions to the rule of not acting on individual responses should be made, however, when you discover that there may be actions or behaviors by current supervisors or staff that create an intimidating or hostile work environment, violate your company's work rules, or when there may be a violation of state and federal laws.
5. **Make Changes only after Talking with Current Staff:** Once you uncover a need for change (based upon the trends in your exit interview data), you should talk to your managers, supervisors, and staff first *before* you make any changes to the current systems, methods,

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**Create a  
structured  
interview, use it  
consistently with  
all exiting  
employees, and  
identify themes.**

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**For more information on  
conducting exit  
interviews . . .**

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**Call Russell Consulting  
(608) 274-4482**

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## Exit Interviews, continued from page 3

**Wouldn't you like to know how all of your employees feel about your company's work environment?**

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policies, supervision, etc. Involving others can strengthen the improvement strategy and help you avoid creating new problems when trying to fix old ones.

6. **Track the Impact of Changes Made:** It's not enough to make changes to your company based upon what you learn from exit interviews; it's also critical that you test whether the changes you implemented resulted in actual improvements in this area. You can track whether the changes had the desired effect by exploring both ongoing exit interview results and by assessing *current* employee satisfaction through employee attitude surveys.
7. **Don't Believe Everything You Hear:** When people choose to leave any organization — especially when they feel abused by the company, its managers, or staff — what they tell you are the reasons for their leaving may or may not be true. People who have an ax to grind, want to protect their future employment with your company, are out to get someone, or are afraid that what they say will be used against them (e.g. reference checks) will often tell you a truth that is filtered through their own self-interest. It is for this reason that we recommend that you only act after *multiple* exit interviews.

### Free Exit Interview Example Available

For a free exit interview example, contact RCI at [RCI@RussellConsultingInc.com](mailto:RCI@RussellConsultingInc.com) or give us a call at 608.274.4482. Contact us as well if you'd like to explore our ideas for helping you integrate an exit interview process into an overall strategy for hiring, motivating, and retaining *GREAT* employees.

"It is better to keep your mouth closed and let people think you are a fool than to open it and remove all doubt."

- Mark Twain

## Read RCI's "White Papers" on Key Issues

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- The Disciplines of Self-Managed Teams
- Will You Outlive Your Organization?
- Understanding Your Organization's Culture
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Jeff & Linda Russell, Co-Directors of RCI

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