

Don't Landfill Your Most Valuable Assets

No one has to tell you that your most valuable assets are the people who turn your authority's goals and objectives into accomplished tasks, yet how often have we watched employees—even those whom we value the most highly--leave without our offering even token resistance? Sure, we're not always in a position to offer the highest salary or the best suite of benefits, nor can we always provide those less-tangible rewards that might attract and help us retain "the best and the brightest," but it's important that we aren't losing people through lack of attention. Whether you've thought about it as such or had it brought home forcibly in the marketplace, you are in bitter competition for top-notch talent every bit as much as NFL coaches are for 400-lb. linemen who create shockwaves on the way to the quarterback—only the talent-pool you draw from may be shrinking.

Few, indeed, are not acutely aware of the low verbal and math achievement levels coming into the workforce from high schools and colleges across the nation. Even where the Generation-X, "aren't you lucky to have me here" mentality has not been elevated to a high art form, finding prospective employees who can read and write English, perform basic mathematics calculations, are willing to show up on time and perform their jobs without your having to resort to an arrest warrant, and can (where required) pass a drug test, is no mean feat. If you look at the population figures, you see that as the baby-boomer generation continues its inexorable march toward the old-folks home, the problem will only become more acute as we enter the 21st century. So what does this mean and more to the point, what can we do about it?

Up Your Own Organization--Please

One of the concerns many corporations have in coming to grips with the inevitable shortage in skilled labor is their belief (well-founded it would seem) that the first to develop inhouse training programs will become rich targets for head-hunters representing their competitors. Yet, sooner or later we're all going to have to bite that bullet or court disaster. Despite what we all feel about the opportunities and rewards our industry offers, we're facing a harder-sell situation for similar skills than many of our competitors—even for those at the same compensation level. This means that we're going to have to become more creative in our recruiting, yes, but it also means that we're going to have to focus even greater attention on our retention efforts, including compensation, opportunity for advancement, professional challenge, enlightened management and administration strategies, as well as education and training programs at every level.

We will be devoting increased editorial coverage of the human resources side of the waste management equation, but we need your input—challenges as well as solutions. How do you recruit for various positions? Do you advertise and wait for prospects to show up, organize or attend job fairs, or make use of employment agencies and head-hunters? Do you maintain contact with schools and colleges in your area or those that offer waste management curricula? Do you send spies out to cherry-pick from your competitors?

Internally, what kinds of programs and strategies do you employ to hold onto your valued employees while simultaneously increasing their qualifications and market value? Are these institutionalized or are they occasional? Are you able to track their cost-effectiveness, and are they demonstrably valuable to your present operation? What are others in your municipality or operating area doing? Finally, would you like to know what others in the industry—both public and private entities--are thinking and doing? I need your input and feedback if we're to mount a valuable effort, so please take the time to let me know your thoughts and ideas. I can be reached by phone at (805) 681-1300, or by e-mail at erosion@ix.netcom.com.