Workplace Wellness: Motivating With a Nudge, Not a Shove

By PETER SARAVIS

Like many businesses across the country, Los Angeles employers are struggling to control their escalating healthcare costs. In fact, when it comes to personnel expenses, healthcare seems to be the biggest wild card of all. Total healthcare expenditures have risen year after year, and it is almost certain that implementation of the Affordable Care Act (ACA) caused a spike in U.S. health spending.

The biggest culprit, when it comes to driving up healthcare expenses, is clearly chronic diseases such as obesity, hypertension, diabetes and other preventable conditions. Collectively workers who are above normal weight or have at least one chronic condition take up more than $151 billion in lost productivity each year. It’s no wonder that the 2011 Kaiser Family Foundation’s annual survey of employer health benefits found that 67 percent of companies with three or more employees providing health benefits also offered at least one wellness program aimed at combating these conditions.

However, offering wellness programs is only half the solution. Motivating employees to take advantage of them is where the rubber hits the road on to decreasing healthcare costs. Smart employers know that this is why a new survey by the National Business Group on Health revealed that employers are sharply boosting financial rewards to engage workers in healthy lifestyles. The survey reports that, among employers that offer incentives, the median amount employees can earn has jumped 50% year over year. That is a serious – and expensive – investment.

Other businesses have used small gifts such as retention items to not only remind employees to take a healthy action, but to instill a sense of reciprocation. One employer mailed refrigerator magnets to remind recipients to schedule a colonoscopy by a certain date. The reminder tool increased colonoscopy appointments from 6 percent to nearly 10 percent.

The concept of commitment works well in nudging employees to stop smoking and lose weight. For instance, in one case a mailer promoting onsite Weight Watchers meetings asked couples to write down their weight loss goals together, prompting significantly increased enrollment. In another employer, the company aggressively publicized the number of employees who had already completed their annual physicals and found that this “peer awareness” greatly helped to nudge those who had not had their physicals to take action. The use of testimonials, such as a breast cancer survivor talking about how a mammogram saved her life via early detection of her lesion, can be powerful motivators as well.

Nudges like these may seem too simple to be effective, but the science behind the psychology is sound. The data speaks for itself. In an environment where employers are actually paying employees to take better care of themselves, using nudges to promote healthier employee lifestyles can pay big dividends over the long term.

Peter Saravis is a leading innovator in designing personalized communication tools that motivate individuals to engage in health and wellness enhancement activities. Contact him at peter@evivehealth.com or visit evivehealth.com.
The Interview Process – How to Select the “Right” Person

How do you select the right person for your business? There is no perfect answer, but the interview process can be a tremendous help if you use it effectively. In this article, you must have completed all of the other steps in the hiring process in order to get the most out of the interview process.

Interviewing candidates for a position within your company is one of the final steps in the hiring process. Before you get to this step, you want to make sure that you’ve completed all of the preceding steps since each of these steps will have a direct impact on how effective the interview process will be. Below is a list of the steps involved in the hiring process. Note that after you have completed the interviewing process, there are still two additional key steps that you need to complete. In order to achieve the best hiring results possible, just remember that all of the steps are important.

In order, the key steps to finding the right person to fill a position in your company include:

- Determining your need to hire a new employee. Are you properly utilizing the skills and talents of your current employees? Do you know what needs to be done? Can your business growth support a new employee?
- Take a hard look at the job analysis. What are the job’s essential functions and key performance criteria?
- Writing a job description and job specifications for the position based on the job analysis.
- Determining the salary for the position, based on internal and external equity. Is the salary comparable and proportional with the salaries and responsibilities of other positions inside your company as well as similar positions in the marketplace?
- Deciding where and how to find qualified applicants. What are the recruitment techniques to be used? What is the time frame for conducting your search?
- Remember, advertising is not the only one, nor necessarily the best way, to recruit.
- Collecting and reviewing a fair amount of applications and resumes and then selecting the most qualified candidates for further consideration.
- Interviewing the most qualified candidates for the position, based on the job description and specification.
- Checking references.
- Hiring the best person for the job.
- Know what needs to be done? Can your business growth support a new employee?

Would like to know how you should handle your interview with the candidate? Here are some tips on how to handle your interview:

- Understand what the candidate needs to know about your business.
- Understand what the candidate needs to know about your business before you begin the interview. Review the job specifications and requirements that have been prepared.
- Know the job and its responsibilities. Review the job description.
- Prepare a list of standard questions concerning the candidate’s skills, abilities and past work performance that you want him/her to answer.
- Prepare a list of prioritized and measurable criteria, either in the form of a worksheet or other method, for analyzing and comparing the candidates.
- Review the candidate’s resume prior to the interview.
- Set specific appointment times and reasonable time limits.
- Be prepared to justify the use of any required employment test. Typically, the most legally defensible tests are those that involve a “piece of the job.”
- Collect Pertinent Information During the Interview.
- Since past behavior predicts future behavior, look for the candidate’s behavior “patterns” as part of your interview. For example, has the candidate enjoyed “big picture” work or detailed analysis more? Is he/herself more of a generalist or more of a specialist? Oftentimes, by listening to how the candidate responds to your questions about previous jobs, you will be able to get a very good idea of what their behavior will be like in the future.
- Try not to offer too much detailed information up front so that the candidate will be able to formulate answers that exactly fit your company’s needs. Don’t put the right words in his/her mouth. Remember, the candidate carefully wants the job and will be looking to say the right thing to impress you.
- Ask questions concerning the candidate’s past performances. For example, if the job, such as an office manager, demands an individual who is well-organized and handles paper work easily, you may want to ask, “How do you keep track of your own schedules and desk work in your current position?”
- Ask specific, structured questions in regards to specific problems that the job holder may face. Focus on past behavior and the results of the candidate’s actions in a particular situation. For example: “As the customer service representative, you may encounter a few unhappy campers who will yell and scream at you over the telephone or in person. Have you had any experience dealing with difficult customers?”
- Who was the most difficult customer you had to deal with? What was the situation? How did you handle the problem?
- Notice how well the candidate listens and responds to the questions asked.
- Notice the candidate’s choice of words and non-verbal behavior. Are they answering your questions clearly?
- Listen to the questions the candidate asks. Clarify the reasons why the questions are being asked. Notice which questions the candidate asks first as they may be his/her primary concerns.
- Take detailed hand-written notes concerning job related topics that will help you distinguish the candidates from one another (especially if you will be conducting several interviews).

Communicate Effectively with Your Staff

By Barton Goldsmith, Ph.D.

To understand how to effectively communicate with your people, you have to first understand some basic psychological truths about how we, as people, tend to communicate. If we communicate with a person in the way they understand best, that communication will be accepted and the team member will respond favorably and be more likely to respond to you before you have finished talking.

Kinesthetic, the third type, are feeling people. It doesn’t matter how things look or sound to them, it needs to feel right (not necessarily good). Still, others imagine things in terms of movement, feeling and action. The famous scientific Einstein used this kinesthetic type of thinking when he formulated his famous theory of relativity.

Thinking like an Independent Contractor, Regardless of What You Do for a Living

By Dave Ilegent

Independent contractors (freelance journalists, software programmers, gardeners) wake up knowing that before sunset they must prove themselves to clients and/or learn a new “piece of the job.” This isn’t egotistical - it’s natural. Once you are most interested in anything that has to do with “learning community?”

Organizational Design

“Think independent” also has a place in overall organizational design. Corporate architects might imagine companies as collections of independent contractors. One manager, at an odd-looking bowling alley-type organization in which employees are dealing with “the impediment of structure” by trying to make everyone an entrepreneur-in-chief, “turning the whole company into a type of franchise organization in which there is a more direct economic connection between tasks and rewards.”

Conducting the Successful Interview – What to Do

1. Prepare in Advance for the Interview.
   - Know what you want in a candidate before you begin the interview. Review the job specifications and requirements that have been prepared.
   - Know the job and its responsibilities. Review the job description.
   - Prepare a list of standard questions concerning the candidate’s skills, abilities and past work performance that you want him/her to answer.
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   - Try not to offer too much detailed information up front so that the candidate will be able to formulate answers that exactly fit your company’s needs. Don’t put the right words in his/her mouth. Remember, the candidate carefully wants the job and will be looking to say the right thing to impress you.

■ Ask questions concerning the candidate’s past performances. For example, if the job, such as an office manager, demands an individual who is well-organized and handles paper work easily, you may want to ask, “How do you keep track of your own schedules and desk work in your current position?”

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■ Notice the candidate’s choice of words and non-verbal behavior. Are they answering your questions clearly?

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Thinking about your business is a big part of ours.

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Worker Misclassification: Are You Risking Millions Of Dollars Without Even Knowing It?

By Peter Dameris

At first you might think that this very moment, your company could be at risk! As the President and Chief Executive Officer of On Assignment, Inc. (NYSE: ASON), I deal with myriad issues affecting employers and talent. We are one of the foremost providers of in-demand, highly skilled professionals in the technology, digital, creative, healthcare, and life sciences sectors. We pride ourselves on transparency and bringing best in class, remaining abreast of critical issues, sharing our knowledge and best practices with our community and our clients to help mitigate unnecessary employment risk.

One of the most critical issues today is worker misclassification. It affects companies of any size and, if left unaddressed, can have serious financial ramifications. It’s important to understand what it is and alert you to the dangers involved.

Worker misclassification is the practice of labelling an independent contractor rather than employees, whether deliberately or accidentally. Most companies are unaware that they’re even doing it, let alone the risk it creates, even though the misclassification is accidental on their part.

However, some employers attempt to reduce payroll costs and avoid paying standard benefits or unemployment and payroll taxes on these workers. Instead, they put workers under the independent contractor umbrella (commonly perceived as anyone who completes a 1099 form), hoping to cut costs.

These companies are putting their bottom lines at tremendous risk. Several large companies have already learned tough lessons about the consequences of misclassification. Heavy hitters like Uber, Lyft, and FedEx have all felt the financial sting of such consequences—with hefty price tags in the hundreds of millions.

In June, FedEx agreed to a $240 million settlement stemming from a class action lawsuit involving misclassification. This comes on the heels of a $226 million dollar settlement in 2015 for a California-only class action misclassification suit. That’s a combined total of $466 million paid.

Uber is currently embroiled in a class action misclassification lawsuit, and is infringing talks with its drivers to strike a deal after a California judge ordered a continuance. This is pending, however, a ruling in a trial date, pending appeals filed by Uber.

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Equally alarming for employers is the crackdown on misclassification by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and the Department of Labor (DOL), which estimates that 30% of employers may be misclassifying their workers. Meanwhile, the IRS has ramped up the investigation and enforcement of misclassification in an attempt to recover what could be billions of dollars in lost tax revenue due to workers being misclassified.

In an effort to improve compliance and present a united front to employers on the issue, the IRS and the DOL signed a memorandum of understanding, allowing the sharing of information and resources to increase compliance with both federal tax requirements and labor laws.

Now, as a leader in your organization, it’s time to ask yourself some difficult but necessary questions:

“Are you, as a company, creating unnecessary risk?”

“Why would it impact us financially?”

As an employer, you should look at your business practices and determine if misclassification has occurred. It hasn’t, then you will have increased awareness and can stay vigilant to ensure continued compliance.

However, if you discover that misclassification is occurring, you should formulate a comprehensive plan to address it, correct it, and bring your company into compliance. The short-term promise of potential payroll savings won’t matter if your company gets hit—either by a law or, by a multi-agency audit. Are you prepared to risk that legal exposure or back taxes and penalties and the potential judgment they may bring?

We all endeavor to lower costs of services, turn human capital into variable costs versus a fixed cost, and improve productivity by reducing down time and attracting highly skilled employees. However, we must be aware of how to achieve these benefits without running afoul of labor laws. We want to know that we are here to help organizations navigate these tricky waters and enjoy the benefits of attracting talent that are productive and flexible.

I feel tremendous pride in the fact that On Assignment provides a solid solution to remove the worry of “what if?”. Let On Assignment partner with you and provide the talent you need and you can rest easy, shielded from misclassification claims.

Our companies are proven leaders in talent solutions, so regardless of your industry, you can feel secure in the knowledge that our 30 years of experience are working to protect you and help safeguard your bottom line.

We are On Assignment.

Peter Dameris is President and Chief Executive Officer of On Assignment, Inc. Learn more at www.onassignment.com.

Staffing: Plug a Hole or Take the Best “Player” Available?

By Bob Greenfield

It’s most walks of life, establishing a clear focus is a good thing, and the sharper the focus the better. However, when it comes to employee recruitment and retention, and building a high performing team or workforce, I’d like to suggest that a narrow or laser-like focus might not be the best approach to effectively achieve both the desired goals.

I’m always intrigued in learning about different professional sport’s team strategies as they prepare for their respective League’s drafts. A professional sport’s amateur draft is one of its two principle mechanisms for recruiting and “fusing” its workforce. Their broad strategic philosophies can probably be clumped into two main categories: drafting players to address clear needs or “plug a hole,” and drafting the best player available regardless of their specific needs at that time.

The first one is a classic dilemma. Should a team draft a player who may fill a known and defined need, or take the best player available, even though their “best” player may be at a position where they are not currently in pressing need?

Should a team draft a player who may fill a known and defined need, or take the best player available, even though that “best” player may be at a position where they are not currently in pressing need?

Let’s start with the question of how to define “best player” in the first place. Is it the candidate with the best resume, brightest credentials, most promising pedigree, and best fitting job skills? I think organizations may too often hear the “resume” and skill and knowledge sets within that looking carefully enough at organizational (culture) “fit” and key intangibles. Examples of such intangibles include adaptability, work ethic, humility and willingness to learn about and fit into the organization culture, winning attitude, etc. These qualities are worth their weight in gold.

When you find an employee with such qualities, someone who is truly a great “fit” in your organization’s work culture, the odds are very high that they will become a valuable asset regardless of their current skill set. The preoccupation with having the right “skill” fit is similar to the preoccupation with having the right organizational structure. Even in the PERFECT organizational structure, a group of poor players poorly led and motivated and with commensurately poor attitudes will always find a way to fail. Yet in the most awkward organizational structure, the right people, a group of motivated go-getters willing to persist until they find a way to succeed will accomplish their goals in spite of the structural impediments. It’s always about having the right people, I am convinced that the kind of “people” that differentiate winning organizations

from the rest has much more to do with attitudes than skills.

I would rather have dedicated, professional, resilient, self-motivated, refuse-to-lose “team” players developing the skills they need than perfectly skilled people who are unmotivated and capricious (or will not work well together, as it is far easier to teach the organization, product, market,...than it is to teach integrity, work ethic, diplomacy, political savvy, presence, and a winning attitude. Said another way, I’d rather hire the inexperienced candidate with the winning mind set and help him learn what he needs to about my business, than hire the experienced and credentialed person who may not be able or willing to Un-learn things that will not serve him well in my organization. So “best player” for me is much more a function of intangible qualities than technical job skills.

Am I saying that what a prospective employee’s “knows” is irrelevant to their future job performance? Yes and no. Yes, their job-specific knowledge may be irrelevant in the long-term. No, their ability to know, i.e., their intelligence, is incredibly relevant. Intelligence is an absolute pre-requisite. I am coaxing on that great attitude to be both well motivated and with commensurately good attitudes will always find a way to fail. Yet in the most awkward organizational structure, the right people, a group of motivated go-getters willing to persist until they find a way to succeed will accomplish their goals in spite of the structural impediments. It’s always about having the right people, I am convinced that the kind of “people” that differentiate winning organizations.

At the end of the day, I think there’s something very analogous between sports teams and work teams. Talented and versatile athletes with a team-first attitude and an unshakeable commitment to do what it takes (including sub-ordinating an ego) to win will achieve superior results to the team with unadaptable experts who have a much clearer concept of what’s “not my job.”

With a light apology to those who prefer not to see sports related to business, perhaps we can all learn something from the way professional sports teams’ general managers think about staffing their high performing teams. In sports, we narrow focused efforts to fill a specific position, we may overlook the available all-star who plays a different position. Organizations are nothing more than the people who comprise them. Get the best ones you can.

Bob Greenfield is an expert in organization development and is owner and principal consultant of Greenfield Management Strategies (GMS). Established in 1999, GMS works in partnership with clients in the private, non profit, and public sectors on a variety of strategic and cultural issues in order to improve collective performance and individual satisfaction. To learn more, visit www.greenfieldmanagementstrategies.com.

HUMAN RESOURCES, STAFFING & EMPLOYMENT

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Having more than one interviewer helps control for personal biases.

5. Be Courteous and Respectful

- Conduct the interview in a private place away from distractions.
- Begin the interview on schedule.
- If possible, conduct the interview without interruptions.
- Allow sufficient time for the interview.
- Appreciate the candidate’s accomplishments.
- Do not patronize the candidate.
- Do not argue with the candidate.
- Thank the candidate for his/her time and interest.

6. Facilitate Open Communication

- Immediately attempt to establish a rapport with the candidate by breaking the ice; for example, ask about their experiences in a particular industry or geographical location (refer to their résumé).
- Promote a relaxed environment with free-flowing conversation.
- Do not dominate the discussion by talking too much. Many experts use a 80/20 rule - you talk 20% of the time and the candidate talks 80% of the time.
- Politely probe the candidate for information by asking open-ended questions that will provide insight into the candidate’s values and traits.
- Ask structured questions that will require some thought on the part of the candidate.

7. Organize and Analyze the Information

- Immediately after the interview when memory is fresh. Don’t try to remember everything, it’s impossible. One idea is to “rate” each candidate on each of the criteria immediately following the interview.

8. Summarize

- Communicate the selection process to the candidate. Offer realistic time frames and stick to your word!

THE SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW - WHAT NOT TO DO

The following list is comprised of subject matter that is widely regarded as “off-limits” for discussion in an interview by employment experts. Most of these subjects relate directly to federal and state employment laws. Legislation covering equal employment opportunity is extensive and complex. Check not only federal laws, but also your own state’s laws and guidelines. Remember, state laws vary! Consult an attorney for legal advice (before you begin the search process for a new employee).

In an interview, or on an employment application, do not ask questions...

- concerning the age of the candidate. Be careful using the words “over qualified” with older candidates.
- about their arrest record (this is different from convictions - in most states, it is permissible to ask “Will you be able to provide proof of eligibility to work in the U.S. prior to hiring?”). It is permissible to ask “Will you be able to provide proof of eligibility to work in the U.S. if hired?”
- concerning physical or mental disabilities. In most cases, physical and mental disabilities are considered job-related, but proceed with extreme caution.
- about whether or not the candidate owns or rents his/her home and who lives with them. (asking for their address for future contact is acceptable).
- concerning the candidate’s credit history or financial situation. In some cases, credit history may be considered job-related, but proceed with extreme caution.
- concerning education or training that is not required to perform the job.
- concerning their sex or gender. Avoid any language or behavior that may be found inappropriate by the candidate. It’s his/her standard of conduct that must be met.
- concerning pregnancy or medical history. Attendance records at a previous employer may be discussed in most situations as long as you don’t refer to illness or disability.
- concerning the candidate’s family or marital status or child-care arrangements (it is permissible to ask if the candidate will be able to work the required hours for the job).
- concerning the candidate’s membership in a non-professional organization or club that is not related to the job.
- concerning the candidate’s credit history or financial situation. Legislation covering equal employment opportunity is extensive and complex. Check not only federal laws, but also your own state’s laws and guidelines. Remember, state laws vary! Consult an attorney for legal advice (before you begin the search process for a new employee).