

Okay, Now That We've Hired Them...

Management Maxims

by Dennis Vicars

I remember a number of years ago, the company I was working for decided to do an experiment to help “enhance” our abilities at staff recruitment and retention. Atlanta and Phoenix were chosen as the two test cities. In Atlanta, beginning wages were increased by 50% above market and existing employees were immediately increased by 10%. The Atlanta study hypothesized that higher wages would assure more and better candidates and raises would keep employees longer.

The Phoenix study, more aimed at retention, required that new employees would be given a 4-week training protocol where, during the first week of employment, they would spend the first day with the director and assistant director, doing paperwork, meeting each staff member, greeting parents and being introduced, etc. . . . They were also given a clean, fitted company t-shirt and work smock. Their pictures were taken and framed and they typed out their bios to distribute to the parents in their classrooms. The bios were also framed and placed with their framed picture next to the door of their soon to be classroom. The rest of the training the first week consisted of company orientation (including history and culture), classroom observation, program study and a 15-30 minute end-of-day session with the director or assistant for Q and A.

In Phoenix, the results were astonishing. Turnover after one year among staff hired during this time period went below 20%; the quality of candidate improved over the course of the year, while wages only increased by 3% over the previous year and child enrollment retention improved.

The results were clear and obvious. People want to feel wanted, appreciated, and welcomed. They want to be successful demonstrating what is expected of them and held to standards on which they are trained. They want to ask questions and offer input which the Phoenix model offered throughout training and beyond. People want to be a part of something bigger than themselves and offered the opportunity to live part of the vision they are helping to create.

With all this being so intuitively easy to understand and realistically able to create, why do we continue to hire reactively and throw someone into classroom chaos before they even know their way to the bathroom? Why do we assume they will learn the program on the fly and that somehow parents will understand? If we know that directors get the enrollment, but teachers and

In Atlanta after one year, the findings suggested that indeed the universe of potential candidates increased substantially. However, as you have probably already guessed, the quality of candidates did not improve measurably, and turnover remained almost the same for both new and old employees.



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staff keep the enrollment, why do we leave so much to chance? Only you can answer these questions as to why you don't have a better, more organized plan for the biggest cost on your Profit & Loss statement. That largest cost is also the long term greatest asset you have for enrollment, program quality, child retention, and annual tuition increases.

George Carlin once said that the two worst days of a person's life are the day you lose a job and the day you find one. I think I understand both these days because I, like you, have experienced both. The second worst day can become one of the best if a few obvious rules on human behavior are observed:

- Treat people the way you'd like to be treated on your first day of work — greeted, introduced, and in some small way celebrated.
- Trained in a concise, organized manner minus chaos and stress.
- Given an opportunity to know the expectations of the school/center and what the job performance measurements look like.
- Encouraged to ask questions and made to feel like a team member.
- Appreciated by actions not words.

Remember, our field has always had a labor shortage, and it goes well beyond low wages. Just as people quit bosses, not jobs, they go to the right bosses for the right jobs.

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