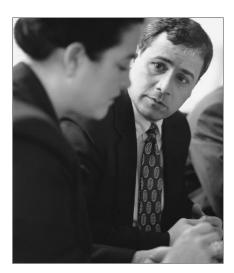# HIRED for GOOD

Quality Human Services Through Innovative Human Resource Management

Successful Recruitment and Hiring: *Assume Nothing– Take A Fresh Look*

Some staff turnover is inevitable, even healthy. But long–vacant positions take their toll on front-line workers who must "double up" caseloads, prompting more workers to leave citing workload stress. Likewise, individuals who come and go "in the blink of an eye" further tax the situation. Improving recruitment and hiring efforts can reduce these problems by getting new workers on the job as quickly as possible and ensuring that these new employees know what to expect.

Common assumptions about filling vacant positions include:

- No one wants these jobs because of poor pay or high stress;
- People who do want the jobs know what they are getting into;
- We know what we are looking for in candidates; and
- We can't do anything about the hiring process, it is what it is.

Do any of these assumptions sound familiar? Then consider:

- A recruitment campaign that builds on agency mission and strengths;
- Encouraging self-selection with screening tools;
- Taking a page from the private sector to select candidates most likely to succeed;
- Making hiring faster and simpler–don't keep the good ones waiting; and
- Not leaving any money on the table–make the most of your personnel budget.

The Recruitment Message: Build on Your Strengths

Most people don't just want a job. Over the years, research has shown that they also want to be part of an organization that has an important mission and that makes a contribution to society as a whole. In all types of occupations, not just human services, employees are more consistently motivated by the chance to perform meaningful work than by rewards such as a bigger salary or a more impressive title.

This fact should give public human services agencies a natural edge in recruiting and retaining staff. But agencies have not taken full advantage of this desire to "make a difference."

A 2003 Brookings Institute survey of college seniors revealed that nearly two-thirds of them seriously considered a job in public service.[1] The main survey findings were:

- Job security and benefits were important, but salary was at the bottom of the list; and
- Public Service was attractive because it offered an opportunity to "make a difference."

While some of these responses can be chalked-up to youthful idealism, they are consistent with findings from a survey of experienced human service workers as well. This survey of experienced state child protective services workers in Nebraska identified the following reasons they stayed in their jobs:[2]

- Agreement with the organization's goals and values;
- Personal fit with the demands of the job (e.g., thriving on the fast pace of doing investigations);
- Coworker relationships; and
- Tangible job benefits such as pay and retirement.

Interestingly, these factors also were highly rated in an otherwise worrisome poll of over 1,200 randomly selected human services workers conducted by the Brookings Institute for the Annie E. Casey Foundation in 2002.[3] Its authors concluded that the human services workforce is in near-dire straits with the only bright spot being the motivation of the workforce.

A detailed look at the results, however, indicates many strengths on which managers can build.[4]

"…(work) is about a search, too, for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor; in short for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying…there is a common attribute here; a meaning to their work well over and beyond the reward of the check."

From Studs Turkel's Working

Human services workers rated their organizations higher than did employees of for-profit businesses on the following measures:

- The organization is open to new ideas (43 percent compared to 36 percent);
- Staff are willing to help colleagues learn new skills (57 percent compared to 51 percent); and
- Fellow workers are concerned with achieving the mission (61 percent compared to 56 percent).

In terms of career goals, only four percent of human services workers strongly agreed that their jobs were "dead end," compared with 12 percent of for-profit workers.

The survey also revealed pronounced differences in job satisfaction. Compared to the for-profit business sector, human services workers were very satisfied with their jobs overall by a margin of 65 percent to 44 percent and very satisfied with

their opportunity to accomplish something worthwhile by a margin of 69 percent to 41 percent.

Predictably, more private sector employees were very satisfied with their salaries than were human services workers. But the margin of 29 percent to 23 percent was perhaps not as great as might have been expected.

Although the survey results add evidence to often cited human resource problems in the human services field, it also indicates that human services leaders have many strengths and assets to build on recruitment campaigns.

Encourage Self-Selection: Realistic Job Previews

"Goodness of fit" between the worker and the job influences retention.[5] Determining a good fit, by both the employer and the candidate, begins in the recruitment process. Delaware and Nebraska are two states that use a video that portrays a "day in the life" of a typical human services worker, known as a Realistic Job Preview (RJP). This screening tool enables potential applicants to "self-select" out of the pool when they see the job demands and decide for themselves that they are not ready for the work. This tool allows the states to maintain a more realistic pool of applicants.

The University of Nebraska's Center on Children, Families and the Law (CCFL) developed and evaluated Nebraska's RJP.[6] It found that the video helped candidates sort out their true level of interest. Those

[1] See The Class of 2003: A Spirit of Public Service, A Brookings Institute Press Briefing, p. 3, available at http://www.brookings.edu/dybdocroot/comm/events/2003.pdf.

[2] Michelle I. Graef, Megan Potter, and Tara Rohde, *Why Do They Stay? Research-Based Implications for Practice*, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Center on Children, Families and the Law, presented at the Child Welfare League of America's, Finding Better Ways Conference on the Workforce Crisis, 2002. Summary available online at http://cwla.org/programs/trieschman/2002fbwrecap.htm.

[3] Paul C. Light, *The Health of the Human Services Workforce,* The Brookings Institute, Center for Public Service, March 2003, available at http://www.brookings.edu/dybdocroot/gs/cps/humanservices.pdf.

[4] See Appendix A in *The Health of the Human Services Workforce.*

[5] Elizabeth Meyer, *Retention of Child Protective Services*, p. 3. http://www.unomaha.edu/~wwwpa/project/meyer.html

[6] For information about the Nebraska Realistic Job Preview and related work see the University of Nebraska, Lincoln's Center on Children, Families and the Law website, http://www.ccfl.unl.edu.

A Job Analysis: Developing an Accurate Description of the Job Requirements

A job analysis is an extensive review of the tasks performed and the knowledge, skills, and abilities needed for a given job. It relies heavily on all current staff completing a standard questionnaire.

Individuals are asked about how frequently they perform certain tasks and how important each task is to successful job performance. For an entry-level social worker, tasks might include the following:

■ Gathering pertinent information from clients and collateral sources in order to make accurate assessments and create/modify the case plan;

■ Prioritizing tasks to allow for a smooth flow of work, ensure timelines are met, and provide a high level of service; and

■ Visiting clients and collaborative service providers to monitor client progress and the continued need for ongoing assessment and service provision.

Individuals are also asked to rate the importance of specific knowledge, skills, and abilities as they relate to successful job performance and how necessary they are for an entry-level social worker, including:

■ The ability to safely and effectively manage complex cases;

■ The ability to weigh the relative costs and benefits of a potential action; and

■ The ability to accept and use constructive feedback.

who thought they might want a human services job and felt more certain after viewing the RJP were more likely to complete the application. Those who suspected that the job would not suit them after viewing the RJP were more likely to opt out, often with revealing comments such as "I thought I would be doing mostly counseling," and "I didn't realize you had to spend so much time in court."

When inappropriate candidates screen themselves out, agencies avoid several problems later on. They spend fewer training dollars on candidates who drop out. They also save the wear and tear on staff that happens, for example, when a new hire quits shortly after being assigned a caseload.

Screening tools are cost effective. The Nebraska agency and CCFL determined that each instance of turnover costs the agency $10,000.[7] This was more than the entire cost of producing the Nebraska video, indicating that an RJP can pay for itself if it helps avoid even one worker loss.

Select Candidates Most Likely to Succeed: Look for Desired Qualities

Another approach to ensuring a good fit between employee and job is knowing what knowledge and skills to look for in a candidate rather than relying solely on a degree, certification, or test. Michigan and Nebraska have drawn from private sector human resource management (HRM) tools to improve candidate selection from the pool of applicants. These tools include:

A formal job analysis that looks at the tasks and activities involved in a given job, such as a child protective services investigator, and pinpoints the qualities–knowledge, skills, and abilities–needed for the tasks and activities. Subsequent employee evaluations use the criteria from the job analysis to assess how well the selection process worked–are the new employees really good "fits?" Results may indicate changes to the analysis.

A structured interview with questions focused on experience rather than credentials or years in the field. For example, a question might ask a candidate to describe how they handled a past situation similar to one that would occur on the job.

Training for all supervisors on how to use the structured interview effectively.

Nebraska also validated a series of HRM tests for the final selection process. These tests included cognitive, problem-solving, and personality instruments. This research confirmed that each of the tests was predictive of one or more aspects of future job performance.[8]

It is no surprise that these tests helped identify good performers in advance. HRM tools of this kind are common in business.[9] But they are not widely used in government, in part because of the added expense.

As with all prevention efforts, however, skimping on candidate selection costs more in the long run. Among other consequences, it increases both turnover and

[7] Michelle I. Graef and Erick L. Hill, "Costing Child Protective Services Staff Turnover," *Child Welfare, 79 (5), 517-533*. This is consistent with other studies. For example, see Paul R. Bernthal, *Calculating Return On Investment for Selection,* Development Dimensions International, http://www.ddiworld.com/. Bernthal estimates that turnover costs between 29 and 43 percent of the annual salary for a particular position.

[8] For a thorough description of the use of job analysis and other HR tools in child welfare, see Michelle I. Graef and Megan E. Porter, "Alternative Solutions to the Child Protective Services Staffing Crisis: Innovations from Industrial/Organizational Psychology, *Protecting Children, 17 (3),* 18-31, available at http://ccfl.unl.edu/publications/cwtraining/Graef_Potter.pdf.

[9] Paul R. Bernthal and Richard S. Wellins, *Retaining Talent: A Benchmarking Study,* p. 2, Development Dimensions International, http://www.ddiworld.com/.

involuntary terminations. When all is said, good candidate selection is simply a smart investment.

Faster, Simpler Hiring

Cumbersome hiring procedures continue to be a significant competitive disadvantage for states and counties. Many job seekers drop out before even completing the application process. Recent graduates, in particular, can't wait for months while the government sorts out its lists. They also find the tests, background checks, interviews, and credential verifications to be overly complicated. Little wonder that recent college seniors who expressed an interest in human services perceived government as "…the most difficult sector by far to enter."[10]

Solutions to these problems include decentralized hiring, online application processes, and accepting specific credentials or educational degrees instead of civil service tests to make the initial cut.[11] The "30-Second Quiz" (see the following page) offers a brief self-assessment of recruitment and hiring efforts that managers can use to quickly ascertain whether they are using the promising practices that are being instituted in jurisdictions around the country.

Make the Most of Your Personnel Budget

Few agencies anticipate additional funding for new staff in the foreseeable future. Therefore, it is critical to use every bit of the approved budget. Delaware, Michigan, and the District of Columbia are three jurisdictions that are maximizing their budgets.

Delaware has successfully used an "overhiring" process, dropping annual turnover among child welfare staff from 48 to 16 percent. Concerned about child deaths and maltreatment, 1997 state legislation authorized the state agency to assign two people to some of its approved positions. This made it possible to establish a pool of new, trained workers ready to assign to caseloads as soon as positions become vacant.

Delaware did not need a budget increase to implement this authorization. The positions were in the budget. In the past, Delaware had met national caseload standards "on paper"–citing budgeted positions. But, as with most public agencies, normal annual turnover typically resulted in unspent funds at year's end. Now, by maximizing the available funding, it meets the standards in practice. The number of caseworkers actually working at any time closely approximates the number of authorized positions.

In a similar strategy, Michigan replaced county-by-county hiring procedures with a regional system that combines counties for purposes of building a flexible human resource pool. This new approach required local governments to give up some autonomy. But under the old process it typically took a county two to four months to fill a vacancy. Now pools of new, trained workers are always ready to start work in any county within a region, allowing vacancies to be filled usually in a matter of days. If regional pools fill up before local vacancies occur, the new workers are assigned to help with short-term needs such as filling in for existing staff who are on leave from their

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10 See *The Class of 2003: A Spirit of Public Service, p. 3.*

11 For a thorough discussion of these strategies, see The Center for the Study of Social Policy's publications: *Human Resource Management Innovation in Selected Jurisdictions,* and *Improving the Quality of Human Services Through Results-Oriented Human Resource Management,* at http:www.cssp.org/major_initiatives/hum_resources.html#hum.

Take a 30-Second Quiz!

Assess how you are doing and what you could be doing to implement promising human resource management strategies for recruitment, selection, and hiring.

How difficult would it be to implement in your agency?

> **x** = Already doing
> **1** = Readily doable
> **2** = Feasible, but will take some effort
> **3** = Difficult
> **4** = Don't honestly know

			Comments
1.	Employee referral bonuses		
2.	Continuous recruitment (hiring takes place continually, whether or not a vacancy has been declared, allowing a "surplus" of case workers to fill in for workers who are temporarily absent)		
3.	Internships and/or tuition assistance are available to college/graduate students		
4.	A realistic job video and/or interactive internet sites that describe the work, "A typical day in the life of a child welfare worker"		
5.	Accessible applications ■ On-line job applications ■ Multiple locations for exams/applications, if they are not available on-line		
6.	Hiring decision authority is delegated to agency and office with the vacancy (no external approval required)		
7.	Competitive salaries (based on salary surveys of equivalent jobs)		
8.	Hiring bonuses		
9.	Flexible entry-level salary schedule		
10.	"Over-hiring" (hiring more people than the number of current vacancies to protect against short-term attrition and ensure vacancies remain filled		

For information about these practices and where they are being used, go to
http://www.cssp.org/major_initiatives/hum_resources.html.

A series of case studies of human resource management "best practices" as they have been implemented in seven jurisdictions is available at http://www.cssp.org/major_initiatives/pdfs/2341_CSSP_Book2_FINAL.pdf. The jurisdictions studied include Maricopa County, Arizona, several counties in North Carolina; Phoenix, Arizona, Sacramento County, California; and the states of South Carolina, Washington, and Wisconsin

Pay Attention! Support New Hires:
The First 12 to 24 Months Are Critical

Successful hiring goes to waste if workers leave quickly. Several efforts and programs demonstrate commitment to new workers and, in turn, garner commitment from staff.

■ **Good supervision is key.** Successful agencies make sure their supervisors are well trained and that they spend time working with their staffs rather than on administrative tasks. Good supervision is one of the most important factors in why child welfare workers stay. Those who stay are "more likely to report that their supervisor is willing to listen to work-related problems to help them get their jobs done."[1] The U.S. Administration for Children and Families provides some background on supervision in child protective services on its website at http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov/pubs/usermanuals/supercps/nature.cfm.

■ **Mentoring programs are also useful if they are well implemented.** Surveys by both the Child Welfare League of America and the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) cited complaints that mentors were often too tied up with their own responsibilities to spend time with new workers. The obvious lesson is that managers need to free up mentors for these assignments and keep tabs on mentoring programs to make sure they are working as intended.

Two states provide mentoring models. In Oregon, new employees must receive six to eight weeks of training, job shadowing, and mentoring before they can be assigned a full workload. As a result, supervisors are understandably motivated to make sure their new hires get into the training and mentoring cycle as early as possible.

Utah has developed program features and controls to make sure mentoring is implemented as planned. Expectations for mentors are spelled-out in a formal guidebook. In addition, mentors are given lighter workloads so they have time for the new workers assigned to them. Supervisors ensure accountability by checking to make sure new hires have received and completed mentored assignments.

■ **Tuition reimbursement programs are an important resource in this endeavor.** The GAO report cited research that 93 percent of participants in agency-university partnerships continued to work in child welfare, including 52 percent in their sponsoring agency.[2]

■ **Pay attention to working conditions.** New recruits, as well as the toughest survivors, won't stay if the organizational climate is poor. Quickly address staff concerns that surface in focus groups, satisfaction surveys, and exit interviews.

■ **Remove administrative barriers to retention.** Most human services staffing studies cite excessive paperwork, or "administrative burnout" as a cause of turnover. This issue may never be comprehensively addressed until practice is adequately supported by information management technologies. Even under newer automated systems designed to better focus on case management rather than service or funding eligibility, administrative time remains a barrier to more effective practice. A report by the GAO estimated that direct service staff spend 50 to 80 percent of their time on tasks required by their state's Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS).

Other surveys and interviews estimate the time more conservatively, at 40 to 50 percent. By any standards, this is still excessive. Reducing the time workers spend on tasks related to the automated information systems to a more reasonable 10 to 15 percent would be equivalent to adding one-third more caseworkers to the agency payroll.[3]

Agencies across the country are struggling to find effective solutions for this specific problem. Durham County, North Carolina, for example, reduced worker stress by off-loading paperwork to casework assistants.[4] Oregon and Alabama similarly allow caseworkers to hand over their notes from field visits to support staff, who then become responsible for getting the data into the agency's data base. ■

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[1] Elizabeth Meyer, *Retention of Child Protective Services Workers,* available at http://www.unomaha.edu/~wwwpa/project/meyer.html.

[2] Untied States General Accounting Office, *Child Welfare: HHS Could Play a Greater Role in Helping Child Welfare Agencies Recruit and Retain Staff,* GAO-03-357, March 2003, p. 25.

[3] workforce retention study of workers in 13 New York state counties in 2002 indicated that 44 percent of worker time was typically spent on "paper work." See *Social Work Education Consortium Workforce Retention Study Executive Summary,* from The Social Work Education Consortium, University at Albany School of Social Work, 2002. In addition, interviews conducted for this newsletter collected estimates about SACWIS tasks.

[4] See *Human Resource Management Innovation in Selected Jurisdictions,* 2002, p. 26 at http://www.cssp.org/major_initiatives/hum_resourfes.htm+hum.

Addressing the Performance Measurement Challenge

Establishing clear and measurable expectations for human services is an acknowledged challenge in the field. Workers, supervisors, and managers want to make a contribution, they want to know they are making a difference, and they want to improve their organization's policies and practices when they are not achieving the desired outcomes for children and families. The difficulty of objectively assessing their contributions and knowing with certainty what works and what does not is often a source of frustration for individuals and organizations.

Poorly defined outcomes and inadequate data have hindered efforts to get a good "fix" on overall organizational performance and the performance of different organizational levels. These conditions have impeded more effective human resource support and alignment of human resource systems–job descriptions, recruitment and hiring practices, training and professional development, and employee performance appraisals and compensation–to the needs of human services organizations in order to achieve overall organizational goals.

These conditions are changing. A growing interest in defining and measuring outcomes at the federal, state, and local levels may supply human resource management systems with the necessary impetus to help.

Focusing on Organizational Outcomes: The Child Welfare Example

Several child welfare reform initiatives,[1] state quality assurance programs, and the federal government have been building the foundation for outcome measurement and reporting in child welfare over the last decade or more. Alabama established a unique state and local quality assurance process as part of a court-approved consent decree in the early 1990's. Other states such as Oklahoma and Utah have followed suit. These states are now demonstrating measurable improvements in outcomes for families and children. In addition, California is beginning to implement new legislation calling for county child welfare departments to track progress toward specific outcomes.

In 2000, the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) in the federal Department of Health and Human Services launched a new child welfare program assessment process called the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR). Based on the practice improvement approach first developed for Alabama, these reviews are a combination of state self-assessment using quantitative data and on-site case reviews yielding qualitative information. The self-assessment piece includes outcome indicators for three designated child and family outcomes: child safety, permanency, and well-being. A sample of these indicators includes the following:

- Recurrence of maltreatment;
- Incidence of child abuse and/or neglect in foster care;
- Foster care re-entries;
- Length of time to achieve reunification;
- Length of time to achieve adoption; and
- Stability of foster care placement.

Pulling Out the Data to Measure Performance

Technological advances are making the data necessary for measuring progress and performance more readily available to all organizational levels. Objective feedback related to defined program outcomes can be easily produced at the unit and caseload levels in many state systems. In addition, states with more mature quality assurance programs send regular reports to supervisors who, in turn, routinely meet with each other and their units to discuss emerging trends and to plan strategies for improvement.

Depending on the flexibility and accessibility of their child welfare information systems, a number of states and counties are using commonly available software to develop unit-and worker-level reports:

- **Vermont** collects regional data on disks and inputs it into a common spreadsheet program. Staff can then use a feature known as pivot tables to click on a particular measure and see information at a regional, unit, or caseload level.
- **Kentucky** extracts data from its information system and also uses a readily available spreadsheet program to format the information into unit-and worker-level reports. Each region has trained staff to create outcome-related reports as needed.

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[1] The Annie E. Casey Foundation's *Family to Family initiative* and the *Community Partnerships for Protecting Children initiative* of the Center for Community Partnerships in Child Welfare are two reform efforts that focus attention on child welfare outcomes and seek to track such measures as repeated maltreatment, foster care entries, child and family well-being, etc.

Addressing the Performance Measurement Challenge

- **Utah** supervisors have been trained to use a commercial, user-friendly, report-writing software that gives them the option to format unit- and worker-level reports on outcome measures. The software uses data that is routinely extracted from Utah's child welfare information system and deposited in a flexible data base known as data warehouse.

- **Oklahoma** uses another available software package to "mine," or extract, data from its child welfare information system and from other state data bases. The extracted information is used to produce outcome reports, and the agency recently made these reports available on-line to unit supervisors.

Implications for Human Services Workforce Development

A defined outcomes focus combined with increasing data capacity opens up many new possibilities for human resource systems and management to actively develop and support a quality workforce.

The following list is a beginning set of ideas for human resource managers and human services administrators to consider:

- As more is known about what kind of practice contributes to improved outcomes, human resource management will be better able to help human services managers define the required job competencies, job descriptions, and up-front selection criteria.

- Individualized outcome reports can tell workers how well they are succeeding with their mission. This gives program supervisors and HR managers a way to respond directly to the best and strongest motivation that employees have to work in human services: the opportunity to help families and children succeed.

- Agency outcome reports can be recruitment tool. Prospective employees are more likely to be attracted to an organization that can show them a pattern of improvement that will motivate them to be part of that success.

- Unit and caseload-specific outcomes can also become part of an integrated HR strategy to recognize, reward, develop, promote, and retain high-quality staff. ■

Successful Recruitment and Hiring:

jobs due to illness, disability, or family duties.[12]

Other solutions require less system-wide reform. The District of Columbia hires temporary caseworkers–usually former employees–to cover short-term medical leaves.

Yet another strategy to maximize available budget dollars at year's end is to request a fund transfer to areas with known impact on employee satisfaction. These include adequate equipment, tuition reimbursement, and training.

Taken together, these budget strategies can help human services managers maximize their human resources. A good first-year goal would be to use up half of the usual savings from vacancies. Subsequent years would build on the first year's success. ■

[12] For more information about Michigan's hiring pool changes, see *Just-In-Time Hiring* in the Annie E. Casey Foundation's publication Advocasey, Spring 2004, available online at http://aecf.org/publications/advocasey/Spring2004/index.htm.