

## ***Why in the world would anyone want to work for You?***

**A Strategic Approach to finding and keeping top talent**

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It was a hot, humid day on the Florida Treasure Coast. And it was getting pretty steamy in the conference room of the beachside hotel. The senior leadership team of the home health agency was mid-way through the first day of their Executive Strategy Retreat. Using the storyboarding technique, we were making a list of the most pressing strategic issues facing the agency. There were lots of hot issues; IPS, getting ready for PPS, information systems, cash flow, and on and on.

One of the senior executives wrote on a card, "Staffing." "If we could just get more good people, we could really grow this business," he said. The group concurred. The nursing shortage, turnover, and increasing business potential were creating some real challenges for the leadership team.

Then the CEO asked which of the two was more pressing, finding people or keeping them. The overwhelming majority voted that retention of top talent was foremost on their minds. "Finding good people is very, very important," they said. "But if you can't keep them, and keep them enthused, the cost in time, dollars, and frustration is astronomical! It's discouraging to have to start recruiting all over again," they all echoed. Wisely, those

home care managers agreed that keeping good people was a top strategy for the coming year. And managers in many other agencies have followed suit.

This scenario played out many times over the next 12 months as I facilitated *Strategic Refocusing*<sup>™</sup> sessions with other home care leadership teams. More and more, this issue of staffing has become a significant strategic issue as leadership teams looked forward to anticipate the future. Since our business is working with home care agencies that want to grow and with home care leaders that want to get ready for the future, we decided to study this issue of staffing from a strategic point of view.

### **Top trends in workforce development**

The Bureau of Labor statistics estimates that by the year 2008, there will be approximately 161 million jobs for 155 million workers. With the shortage of workers, it's critical that managers, doing everything in their power to create a great place to work, not only recruit top talent but keep the good people they've found to serve their valuable customers. Another report in the Occupational Outlook Handbook published by the US Bureau of Labor showed that 7 of the 10 fastest growing occupations were in healthcare and human service related occupations.

The staffing situation is even more critical in home care. Many agencies are having to turn away referrals because of the shortage of nurses, and growing the private duty business has become very difficult because of the challenges in finding and keeping home care aides and personal care attendants.

Several years ago our company did some projections on the need for home care aides over the next ten years. In 1995, there were just under 300,000 home care aides in the

U.S. Our data showed that the trend would grow to over 700,000 home care aides by 2005. The challenge has been that the need exists, but the supply of available workers has not kept up with the demand.

It's no longer an option, or a random idea. Creating a great place to work must be a high-priority business strategy. The following top trends in workforce development impact both recruiting and retention of workers:

### **1. A Shift from Technique to Strategy**

Responsibility for staff recruiting and retention is shifting from staff recruiters and the human resources department, to line managers and the senior executive team.

The approach to recruiting and retention is shifting from “tools and techniques” to “corporate strategy” designed to create competitive advantage in the marketplace.

### **2. Increased Value of Learning**

Senior executives recognize that every leader in the organization must have great people skills. More organizations are providing executive coaching and ongoing leadership development for managers who lack the requisite skills.

### **3. Mixing marketing and recruitment**

Many organizations recognize that their marketing efforts also have a great impact on their recruiting. Healthcare organizations are taking recruitment into account in the design of their advertising and marketing campaigns, and vice versa.

### **4. Using Job Extenders**

Highly skilled and educated workers are becoming more scarce. Healthcare organizations are looking for ways to get work done with lesser skilled workers. Technology will serve as a job extender in many applications.

### **5. Targeting special populations**

Study your best workers. Target your recruiting efforts at similar demographic populations.

## 6. E-recruiting

The growth of the internet and information technology has created a logical extension for the recruiting process. Many healthcare organizations are finding that web sites have become a valuable recruiting tool, including their own web sites, local recruiting sites, and national recruiting sites.

Paying attention to these trends and learning from what others are doing is an important part of approaching staffing from a strategic perspective.

### Creating Strategic Staffing Advantage

*Strategic Staffing Advantage™* is the process of creating competitive advantage in your recruiting marketplace. The process involves defining the unique factors that set your organization apart from its competitors. In other words, why in the world would you want to work at your facility? If you can't answer this question, you will have a very difficult time finding and keeping the people you need to grow your agency.

Who are you as an organization? What do you do differently from other healthcare organizations? To have *Strategic Staffing Advantage™* and find and keep top talent in your organization, you need to differentiate your facility from all of the other facilities in your market area.

### The seven sources of *Strategic Staffing Advantage™*

From my company's work with hundreds of organizations, we've identified the following concepts that depict the top values that motivate employees and what is important to them in a great place to work. They serve as a basis for determining the

single source, your Strategic Focus that will set you apart from your competitors. Since you can't focus on all seven of these factors, you need to pick one as your Strategic Focus. Then pick two more as supporting strategies. Putting these three strategies together in your own unique combination is what we call building your Strategic Focus Pyramid. (See figure 1)

1. **Servant-leadership:** We know from our research that prospective employees will join an organization and current employees will stay when they see a leader who puts service before self. Employees want a leader who has a clear vision for the future, a plan to get there, a communication style that makes them feel included and a passion for the purpose of the organization.

2. **Meaningful work:** People want to do work that is important and has a positive impact on the lives of others. The events of September 11 are bringing this out even more. While many nurses may have joined their profession to help people, this drive often gets lost in the endless paperwork and tremendous workloads that home health care professionals must balance. To connect your staff with what brought them to home care, find different ways to emphasize the importance of what they do, and the positive influence they are having on the lives of their patients and their families.

3. **Appreciation and Recognition:** Employees want to work for managers who express appreciation. People want to feel valued, and to feel like they are recognized for the contributions they make. This strategy is based on both formal and information appreciation and recognition. It takes a concerted, focused effort to create a culture of appreciation and recognition

**4. Career Opportunity:** To many folks, a job as a home health aid, personal care attendant, or even LPN may be viewed as a dead end job. Some organizations are creating career ladders, even for paraprofessional positions, and finding ways to promote workers to higher level positions through education, training, and job experience. One CEO we worked with took it on as her personal project to create a career ladder for CNAs. She was delighted with how some of the least likely employees responded to the education offerings that went with the process. "They were more interested in the learning than in the money or titles that went with the promotions," she said.

**5. Flexibility and Life Balance:** Home care workers are looking for a workplace that allows them... even encourages them... to have balance in their work and personal lives. Many home care workers, especially those who are single moms, have a great need for flexibility and assistance in arranging child care and elder care, attending school and sporting events for their children, and dealing with aging parents.

We also need to recognize that workers from different generations have different career expectations. Younger workers have very diverse views of work, flexibility, and balance than their slightly older colleagues. Agencies that apply this strategy will need to find innovative ways to balance the staff member's desire for flexibility and life balance with the agency's need to run a 24/7 operation.

**6. Relationships:** The relationship strategy is based on the premise that... "all things being equal, people would rather work with a friend. All things being unequal, people would still rather work with their friends." For many home care staff members the workplace is the one place where they can have positive, peaceful personal relationships. It's a place to be with other people who really care about them. Our research has shown that employees will stay much longer in an organization where they have positive

relationships with their managers and co-workers, and will leave more quickly when there is a hostile environment, and where people just don't seem to care. Another study showed that when nurses are willing to discuss the patient's condition and care plans with home health aides, the aides are less likely to quit than in agencies where nurses don't have good communication with the aides.

**7. Compensation & Benefits:** It is possible to find and keep people by paying them more and providing better benefits. Today we see things like big sign-on bonuses, paid time off, paid childcare, and fully paid benefits. Unfortunately, in home care we don't have that much negotiating room since margins are slim. Paying employees more or giving better benefits is pretty difficult to sustain in home care since there's not a lot of flexibility in revenue generation and your competitors can always come along and match your offering. Even if you choose not to be the highest paying agency in town, it is important to have a compensation strategy that enables you to be in a reasonable range with other employers, and that is viewed by your employees as fair and balanced.

### **The Strategic Focus Pyramid**

The ideal approach to focus is to pick just one strategy, and execute it so well that you become truly unique. Most healthcare organizations we have worked with find it difficult to focus on just one source, so we've created the Strategic Focus Pyramid. We suggest you select one source of staffing advantage from the above list as your *Strategic Focus*. Concentrate on being truly unique in that one area. Support your *Strategic Focus* with two strategies.

For example, after a strategy session, a recent home care client of ours chose Appreciation and Recognition as its *Strategic Focus* with their two supporting strategies being Flexibility and Pay and Benefits (Figure 1). Because they are now focused, they are

clear in their vision, and well on their way to consciously positioning themselves for their uniqueness in these areas. They made a serious commitment over the next three years to create a culture in the organization where every person feels appreciated, and where recognizing others for their contributions is a regular occurrence.

It was pretty clear to them that this is not a short-term, quick fix. Yet they truly believed that this Strategic Focus is going to have much more of an impact on their ability to grow than writing better ads in the Sunday paper, and finding a way to pay better bonuses. The agency made a major commitment to developing their leadership team, and emphasizing the knowledge and skills needed to create a culture of appreciation.

The next supporting strategy was to look for new and innovative ways to provide more flexibility and life balance for staff. This included getting staff involved in scheduling and having teams work together to enable each other to have more flexibility. At the same time, the agency leaders needed to emphasize the importance of 24/7 care of patients, and the negative impact that could occur if too much flexibility gets in the way of patient care. The agency was delighted with how employees worked together to help each other with family and personal time, and still make sure all of the patient care needs were met. The final supporting strategy for this agency is Pay and Benefits. They recognized that they could have a workplace that was wonderful for appreciation, recognition, and flexibility but when pay scales fall too far behind the marketplace people will still leave. The leadership team developed a clear compensation philosophy, communicated it to all managers and staff, and set up a process to monitor pay and benefits in the community. The result is an agency that is not known as the highest paying, but one that pays fairly and is a great place to work.

## Keeping top talent: It begins with the leader

No matter how much strategy you develop and how much focus you have, keeping good people largely depends on the individual leaders and their attitude, knowledge, and skills with people. “Employees stay because their managers create a place where they want to be,” says Margaret Littman (4, p. 50). She interviewed Marcus Buckingham, senior Vice President at the Gallup Organization. Buckingham said that Gallup polled more than two million employees at 700 companies worldwide for an ongoing workplace-trends project over a 25-year period. Buckingham found that immediate supervisors are the single largest influence on an employee’s decision to quit; **“People leave managers, not companies,”** says Buckingham. (4, p. 50)

What can supervisors, managers, and leaders on all levels of the organization do, on an individual, moment-by-moment basis, to retain top talent? The answers are simple, and the actions are fairly basic, but putting them into practice takes desire, discipline, and work.

The following techniques are valuable in retaining top talent:

- ◆ Make connections. Check in each day with each person who reports to you. Show interest in them and their work. Regularly ask about family and special events in their lives.
- ◆ Build self-esteem and confidence through immediate, specific, and sincere affirmations. You have choices. You can either look for what people are doing well, or you can look for what they are doing wrong. Either way, the behavior that gets rewarded gets repeated.
- ◆ Ask people’s opinions, listen to their responses, take action when you can, and give them credit for ideas.

- ◆ Provide a mentor for a new team member.
- ◆ Find out what motivates each person. One size does not fit all.
- ◆ Delegate fun projects that will make a person “a star.”
- ◆ Provide constant training and development. Create personal development plans. People love to learn and are motivated by new ideas.
- ◆ Redesign the job. Create change to provide new challenges.
- ◆ Let people create their own job descriptions and titles. I read of one Director of Sales and Marketing who changed her title to “Princess of Persuasion!”
- ◆ Use creative staffing patterns and flextime. Flexibility is high on the list of motivators for today’s workers.
- ◆ Put an “I appreciate you because...” note in with a paycheck. People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but they will never forget how you made them feel.
- ◆ Ask, “What am I currently doing that makes you feel valued?” (You want to know so you can continue doing it.)
- ◆ Ask, “What can I do to help you be more productive?” (You want to know so you can start doing it).
- ◆ Be honest. Say ‘thank you’ often. Apologize when you’re wrong.

Yes, it’s true these strategies take time and resources; time and money that could be used in other projects and tasks. If we really believe that old cliché, "people are our most valuable resource," then we need to take long term action to make that wish become reality. We need to have clear strategies, concrete action plans, and methods to measure our results. When you and your leadership team develop a clear focus, you will be able to create *Strategic Staffing Advantage*<sup>TM</sup> in your agency and your community. Your

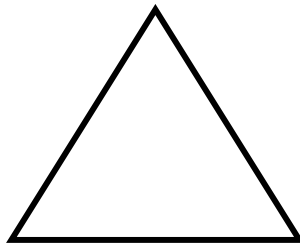
managers and staff will be able to answer the question, "Why in the world would anyone want to work for you?"

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Figure 1. Strategic Focus Pyramid

Strategic Focus: Appreciation and Recognition



Supporting Strategy: Flexibility

Supporting Strategy: Pay and Benefits

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