

HR Florida Review

SUMMER/FALL 2006

For Florida's Human Resources Professionals



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BEST PLACES TO WORK

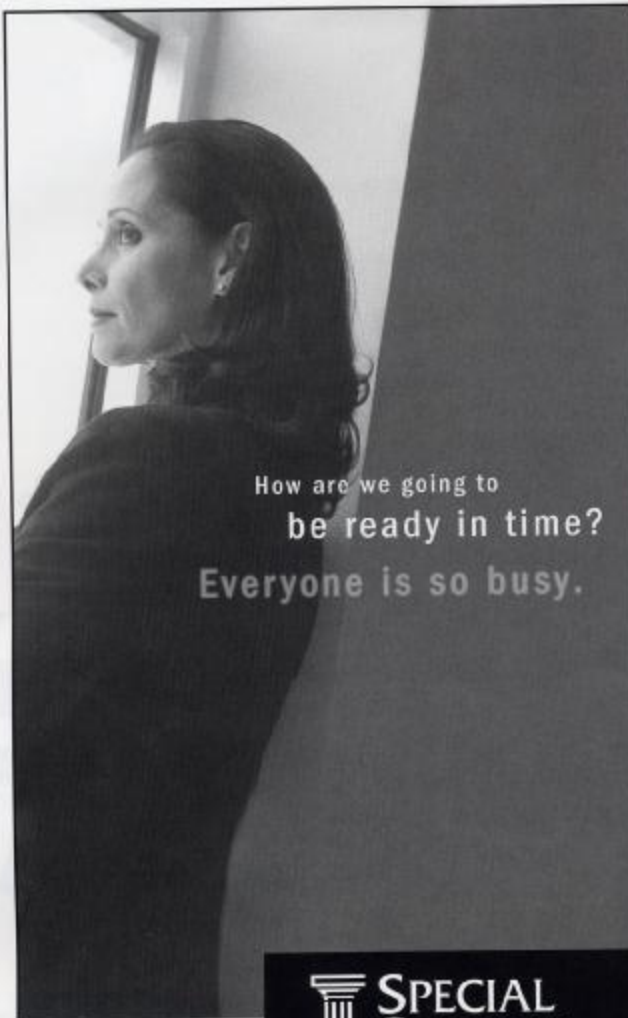
By Gerry Hoeffner

HOW DO YOU MEASURE UP?

The unemployment rate in Florida will soon drop below 3 percent. As a result, there are not as many talented workers out there to choose from. The employment well is drying up. And though Florida is blessed with what seems to be an unending stream of willing transplants from northern states, we are still, for all intents and purposes, at "full employment." The time it takes to fill those empty positions is increasing and the turnover costs are having a greater effect on the bottom line. Companies are scrambling to figure out how to attract more applicants and soon they will have to contemplate how to service their customers without these positions filled.

In a full employment market, employees have choices. They don't have to work for any particular company. They can trade their skills to the highest bidder. The skills they possess are a commodity that can be sold to whatever type of company is in need of them. No longer does a construction worker have to stay in the construction industry to make a good living. He can work for a call center in air-conditioned comfort. Today's nurse can easily become a teacher or sales representative. The most talented employees will soon realize that their talent is in short supply and if companies want to keep them, they better offer a retention package that is much better than what is being offered down the street. Unfortunately, most organizations have no idea how their workplace measures up with the company across town or across the street.





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Attraction and retention of talent is one of the reasons the Best Places To Work program was developed. In the past two years, the program has surveyed 250 employers about their outcomes and best practices. The program produced an individualized report for each company, detailing how they compare to other businesses in 37 different areas. The majority of the companies participating in the program do so to get the data from the survey and compare themselves to other employers in their community. For them, the Best Places To Work program is not about winning the award; it is their annual scorecard indicating whether or not they are truly attractive to those few talented employees who are looking for new positions.

The results show trends in what many of the "Best" workplaces are doing to attract top talent and retain those employees they worked so hard to recruit. The trends are listed below.

Orientation:

Since most employee turnover occurs within the first year, employers are increasing the time spent ensuring that new employees adjust to their new work environment. Mentors are being assigned to the new employees. The mentor is there to answer questions, offer advice, eat lunch with the new employee and detect the first signs that the organization is not meeting the new employee's expectations.

Orientation classes are going far beyond the normal, dull review of the handbook and benefits packages. The "Best" employers understand that orientation classes can make a bold statement. It is an opportunity for the organization to celebrate the new employee and welcome him/her to the family. It is about having fun and demonstrating that the organization is actually committed to ensuring the new employee is successful.

Training and Employee Development:

Of the 250 companies surveyed, the average (average includes terminated employees) annual expenditure on training and development was \$571 per employee. While there are still companies that do not understand the value of training and development, those that are recognized as one of the "Best Places To Work" excel in this area. There is a direct correlation between high levels

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BEST PLACES TO WORK

of training and development and low turnover rates.

Companies are using multiple delivery methods for training, such as classes at local colleges, Internet training and self-instruction. Though training is offered to everyone, the "Best" pay particular attention to the development of first line supervisors. Promoting someone to a supervisory level position without the proper training only adds to your turnover.

A growing trend appears to be the assigning of mentors to the best performers. The mentors act as a coach to the up-and-coming star and are responsible for guiding the talented individual into areas of greater responsibility.

Decision-Making Opportunities:

Employers are extending opportunities to employees to get them involved in the decision-making process. Going beyond the regular weekly and monthly meetings, employers are encouraging employees to participate in strategic planning and a variety of operational committees. The "Best" employers understand that the more they allow employees to get involved in the direction of the company, the more likely they are to stay with the organization.

Annual surveys are also used to gather feedback from employees and allow participation in decision-making. Though most organizations do not offer this opportunity, more organizations are taking advantage of gathered data to reduce their turnover.

Benefits:

Most of the surveyed benefit plans shared quite a few similarities. The most surprising discovery is

the variation in the participation in benefit plans. The "Best" companies encourage participation in the benefits plans through education and higher contributions. The better companies have participation rates much higher than the average company.

For example, the average participation rate for 401k, 403b and 457

plans is 61.5 percent of eligible employees. The "Best" companies have participation rates much higher than the average. These organizations understand that a benefit is no longer a benefit if the employee does not participate.

The biggest trend we have noticed is that employers are reducing and, in some cases, completely doing away

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with the waiting period for vesting and vacation time. In a recent county survey, two employers based their employees' vacation time on the experience they brought to the position, not the length of time on the job.

Growth:

The "Best" companies are growing. A growing company offers opportunity and stability. Talented employees are looking for those employers that can offer double-digit growth.

Unfortunately, a company's apparent growth is meaningless if the organization cannot fill the new positions. The value of growth is directly correlated to the recruiter's ability to find talented employees. If the recruiter is unable to fill the positions, growth quickly becomes a negative.

Life/Work Relationship:

The Life/Work relationship is an area many employers are focusing on. A large number of employers offer four-day workweeks, half-day Fridays or the option of purchasing extra days off. Though the efforts differ greatly, sick rooms, after

care programs and children in the workplace are all being attempted. The efforts vary, but the message is the same: we understand and we will work with you and your family.

Engaged Employees:

In the surveys, we also noticed an effort to engage employees. Employees are involved in decision-making, and executives are sharing the details of the profit and loss statements. Most of all, we noticed a real attempt to earn the trust of the employees. The "Best" companies understand the importance of creating professional relationships with their employees, but if the employee is to continue his/her

commitment to the organization, the company is going to have to earn the employee's trust. A company will not earn this trust unless they get to know each employee on a personal level.

As the unemployment rate continues to decline, employers can expect their turnover rates and costs to increase. Employers will need to continue to monitor their competitiveness in the market. It is more than just pay. Yes, employees want to be paid well, but they also want to be treated well. If you are going to be competitive in this employment market, then the first question to ask is, "How Do You Compare?" ■

How Do You Compare?		
	State Average	Your Company
Turnover	21.4%	_____
Training Expenditures	\$571 per employee	_____
Growth Rate	9.0%	_____
Promotion Rate	10.9%	_____

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The information in this article is the result of a review of randomly selected counties in the State of Florida. All of the counties represented in this information have participated in "Best Places To Work" programs in 2005.

This review consists of almost 60,000 employees in 11 counties in Florida. Major metropolitan areas (Miami, Tampa, Orlando, etc.) are not included in this review.

If you would like to bring the "Best Places To Work" program to your area, call 772-467-9212.