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Employee Retention – Benchmark Your Jobs, Not Your People

Many companies benchmark their top performers to determine how to hire more people like them. That's a good idea, but here's a better one.

Instead of benchmarking your people, benchmark your jobs. When you benchmark people there are variables that may skew the results and not give you an accurate picture of the ideal person for the position. When people assess other people, their personal biases enter in, in addition to the fact that people are complex and bring unknown variables that may or may not have anything to do with success in the job.

If you "let the job talk," so to speak, you'll get an accurate and reliable picture of how the job should be done – the behaviors, motivations, and personal skills needed for the ideal job fit.

Here are the steps to follow in benchmarking a position.

First, get three to seven people in the company who know the job well (your subject matter experts) to sit down with an unbiased facilitator and begin listing everything the person in the position must do for the job to exist. Then categorize the list; categories might include Professionalism, Communication, Customer Service, etc.

From those categories the group defines the Key Accountabilities for the person in the job. A Key Accountability is a concise statement that describes the performance objectives for a particular position. Most jobs will have from three to five Key Accountabilities.

An example of a Key Accountability for the job of receptionist might be to "Provide excellent service in a pleasant and professional manner to customers and team members at all times." Key Accountabilities are not lists of tasks, although the person's job duties can fall under the heading of each Key Accountability.

The job experts then prioritize each Key Accountability and rank them as to order of importance. Everyone should take notes and keep the Key Accountabilities in front of them for the next step.

When everyone is satisfied the Key Accountabilities are complete, they're ready to do two job benchmarking assessments. The first looks at the behaviors needed for the job;

the second looks at job motivators, what values people ideally should have to be passionate about the job. Referring to their Key Accountabilities throughout, participants must reach a consensus on how to rank the statements of behaviors and motivators in the job benchmarking questionnaires.

Then the company assesses its employees and compares the job benchmarking assessment with their scores. Those who best match both job assessments will be your top performers and people with those behavioral styles and values are the ones you want to hire in the future.

Companies that do job benchmarking have achieved some amazing results in reducing turnover and increasing job satisfaction.

- A mortgage company was experiencing over 300% turnover annually among their sales department. The position was benchmarked and the top 5 sales people were compared to the benchmark. Turnover was reduced 250% in just 6 months after job benchmarking.
- Another company was losing 50% of its new hires during the training program. Benchmarking the job and bringing in the right people increased retention to 80%.
- Another organization had a 74% turnover in its sales force. After the benchmarking and debriefing, they reduced that number to zero during the last 18 months. (Source: Target Training, International)

High turnover has a high price, not only in money, but also in stress and low morale to HR departments, recruiters, supervisors, and support teams. The costs of job benchmarking and employee assessments are extremely low by comparison.

A 2006 study of 422 HR professionals showed that 49% of them said attracting and retaining new talent is their top challenge. At corporations with revenues over \$1 billion, 77% of the HR professionals ranked attracting talent as one of their top five priorities. By comparison, 73% chose health-care costs as their number one challenge. (Source: Human Resource Professional Online, March 1, 2007)

Companies that want to attract top talent will increase their odds of doing so with job benchmarking. As Jim Collins says in his book, Good to Great, "People are not your most important asset. The right people are."

Key performance indicators are best determined by benchmarking a job. For more information, go to <http://www.coachannette.com/jbmarticle.htm> Annette Estes is a Certified Professional Behavioral and Values Analyst, human resource consultant, trainer, coach, and author of the award-winning book Why Can't You See It My Way? Resolving Values Conflicts at Work and Home. You can order the ebook at <http://www.resolveconflictnow.com>