



## WORDS ON WISE MANAGEMENT

### Good people are hard to find—really?

by Joseph Godwin

Managers and business owners in all industries find the recruitment and retention of skilled and capable employees a major challenge. However, you can improve your hiring success rate by taking a different approach to your selection and supervisory practices.

#### **Accountability pays off**

My client's payroll department had a horrendous turnover rate. The payroll manager, "Kathy," is a bright, hard-working, and knowledgeable woman, but she described each new hire as "awful," "lazy," and "making mistakes."

Obviously, Kathy's supervisory skills weren't nearly as strong as her accounting skills. But simply sending her to a training class wouldn't have helped—in part because she perceived that her own style has "worked" for her so far and resulted in her attaining a management position in a short time.

I interviewed Kathy about her employees' work. "Kathy," I said, "you've complained that Heather doesn't ask your permission before issuing early checks to vacationing employees. Have you ever told her to ask you about it?" Kathy's response, which I've heard many times, was, "Well, she ought to know that." I was willing to bet that the actual message from Kathy was closer to "do your job, and don't bother me unless the building is on fire."

The conversation continued:

Q: You say Heather is doing an awful job. Who hired her?

A: I did.

Q: Who gave her working instructions?

A: I did—sort of.

Q: Who corrects her if she makes mistakes?

A: I do—when I catch them.

Eventually, Kathy started to realize that if she had the authority to select candidates, hire them, and give instruction and correct errors, then maybe she might bear some of the responsibility for their success.

I told Kathy she might not like my recommendation to management—that she not be allowed to terminate any more employees. Instead, I suggested

that she keep the employees she had hired, with her own performance being based on how well they performed. Fortunately for Kathy's career, her approach and attitude changed very quickly.

#### **So what did she learn?**

Our conversation resulted in several lessons for Kathy, including the following:

- (1) Pay attention to the selection process. Try not to have to hire someone *today*. Ask specific and detailed questions about experience.
- (2) Ask follow-up questions, even if you're satisfied with the first answer. Never back off a requirement that you believe is necessary.
- (3) Put some time in to get a new hire off to a good start. The person has never worked for you before, and even if he's experienced, he needs to know how *you* want it done. Cover everything you think is important in the job.
- (4) Give good and thorough instructions, being careful not to assume that an employee "knows it" already. If you care about how an individual performs his job, then you'd better make sure he knows what you want.
- (5) Don't wait until you can't tolerate an employee anymore to make corrections. Correct the smaller instances in a nonjudgmental manner and with positive instructions on how to avoid the error in the future.
- (6) Be accessible. If you've hired an employee with initiative and he can't find you, he'll go ahead and do the thing he's contemplating doing anyway.

#### **Bottom line**

Regardless of the industry or the overall availability of applicants, an employer that follows Kathy's new practices will greatly improve the chances of attracting and retaining "good people."



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