

# Building a 21st Century Workforce



Patrick Ibarra, The Mejorando Group



a newspaper, on their website and include it on their job hotline, while sitting back waiting for applications from qualified candidates to come pouring in are OVER! It's a competitive talent marketplace, and the old recruiting ways are long gone. The "post-and-pray" method of posting a job listing and praying that good candidates would apply doesn't work anymore. That's because today's recruiting efforts must be proactive, dynamic and capable of engaging candidates through the entire candidate lifecycle.

It's important to think like a marketer, understanding that hiring is not simply about generating a large number of applicants, but should be a targeted approach aimed at attracting high-caliber candidates:

Every day in the United States, 10,000 people turn 65. And according to the Pew Research Center, millennials now outnumber baby boomers in the workplace, 76 million to 75 million, while millennials will make up 75 percent of the workforce just 10 years from now.

As a result of the rapidly aging workforce, government organizations – small and large, rural and urban – are experiencing a brain drain that is placing their organizations at a critical juncture: The need for experienced and seasoned employees has never been greater, while those are the very workers who are most likely to be departing in the very near future.

As they seek to shape the workforce indispensable to executing their missions, government finance leaders must realize they are contending with the private sector for talent as never before and they are facing substantial challenges in attracting and – perhaps even more important – retaining their best people.

The battle for talent continues to intensify and the need to attract and retain top performers remains essential to organizational success. By distinguishing oneself from the competition, by promoting strengths and confirming values ensures your organization will stay ahead of the pack and becomes an employer of

choice during both recession and boom times. The sum of all these moving parts is that for government finance leaders to build their 21st-century workforce, old models must be discarded in favor of "next practices" – contemporary, progressive and practical strategies and tools to attract, retain and optimize talent.

### **Raising the Caliber of the Talent Pipeline**

The first step in pursuing change in recruitment is for there to be a shift in mind-set away from the status quo practice of "we've always done it that way" and towards the realization that your organization is an employer. In order to recruit the most qualified and talented candidates, the organization and its leaders must take actions consistent with that approach. In addition, there should be recognition that recruiting, while primarily a Human Resource Department function, must be shared by the Finance Department; creating a healthy and viable "pipeline" of incoming talent is a responsibility all members of the organization should share.

The best people today aren't simply looking for a job. They want meaning and impact, and local government is all about having an impact on the quality of life for citizens. The time when all government agencies had to do was simply post an ad in

- These days, it's hard to overestimate the value of social media in the hiring process. Sites like Facebook and LinkedIn have emerged as more important than agency hiring websites and seem poised to overtake them as the primary focus for prospective job-seekers.
- The world is crawling with smart, skilled, zealous people who won't be remotely interested in your organization if what you provide as a job announcement is the kind of utterly dull description that's still far too common for government. Use more of a social-marketing approach that offers a powerful message: Join our organization and be a part of something truly outstanding.
- As in other aspects of life, first impressions are critical. Job candidates from all walks of life want ease and convenience when applying for positions. Public-sector employers often require a series of written exams and performance tests as part of their hiring process, but keeping the interest of talented candidates means streamlining and simplifying this too-cumbersome process.
- Feature testimonials from current employees about your wonderful

organization and how the work is challenging. Testimonials by existing employees can relay powerful messages not only about the job/role one has, but the environment in which they work. The more progress your agency makes in this area, the more you will set yourself apart from other government employers.

- Modify promotional practices to factor in performance as much as seniority, because it's a myth that seniority translates to competence, just as it is a myth that technical proficiency translates to supervisory effectiveness.

Wise leaders pivot from these tired old notions and adopt a more practical approach that reflects what they're seeking from their workforce. Remember, hiring is like dating — you get what you look for.

### **Strengthening the Internal Bench of Potential Successors**

Progressive organizations realize that in today's workplace, candidates and employees alike are seeking an employer who chooses to invest in developing their skills and capabilities as a strategy to elevate employee performance and improve organizational effectiveness. They also acknowledge that being recognized as an employer who, even-through tough economic times, makes the strategic decision to invest in their workforce builds a reputation as a builder of people and that, ladies and gentlemen, is a magnet to retain and develop talented people.

- Learning Program – It's time to move away from the training mindset (considered an expense) and instead to a learning approach (considered an investment). If not already in place, you should immediately develop a series of learning courses which focus on equipping employees with the requisite leadership, management and supervisory skills. In addition to the traditional topics of managing employee feedback, communication and delegation

emerging topics include Leading Change, Innovation, and Performance Management. Ask yourself "what if we don't develop our people and they stay?"

- Mentoring – Establish a pool of willing employees interested in sharing their knowledge with others. Mentoring Programs are easy and inexpensive ways to both effectively transfer tacit knowledge about city operations from senior employees to others, as well as enable those employees who are seeking advice and counsel to develop their capabilities in advancing their career goals.
- Growth – Your employees will increase their capabilities and position themselves for future opportunities not just by learning new skills and actively engaging in a mentoring partnership, but also participating in a series of targeted employee development activities. For instance, rotating job assignments, "acting" roles and shadowing are attractive to top performers who want to stretch themselves.
- Career Development - The concept of a career is transitioning from the traditional ladder, where up is the only way to go, to more of a lattice, where employees move in different directions – up and sideways – gaining essential skills and experiences to keep pace in today's quickly changing workplace. Most finance departments do not have a structure that lends itself to clear career paths anyway. Consequently, it is incumbent, regardless of the size of your agency to create a process involving key leaders from your Finance and Human Resource Departments and interested employees in co-creating a customized career plan for those employees. Be careful not to assume classification levels are career paths, they are not. Instead, they are tools for compensation purposes.

What all these "next practices" approaches have in common is a focus on transitioning to the workforce that is right for the times as they are now and as they will be. The old models just won't get you there. 📊

*Patrick Ibarra is an "entrepreneur of ideas" and architect of innovation who takes the headwinds governments are facing about the current climate of unprecedented changes and translates them into a tailwind with practical, tactical and impactful solutions that can be used immediately. Patrick, a former city manager, owns and operates an organizational effectiveness consulting practice, The Mejorando Group ([www.gettingbetterallthetime.com](http://www.gettingbetterallthetime.com)), and is one of the country's leading experts on optimizing the performance of public sector organizations. Mejorando is Spanish for "getting better all the time," and Ibarra's firm brings fresh thinking, innovation, and new ideas to help governmental organizations succeed in the 21st century. For those seeking additional information, Ibarra can be reached, either by phone at (925) 518-0187, e-mail at [patrick@gettingbetterallthetime.com](mailto:patrick@gettingbetterallthetime.com).*