

## Finding Top Performers When Jobs Go Begging By Bill Gilbert

- *Alberta Poaching London Labour*; “McDonald's pays \$18 an hour”; “7-11 convenience stores offer retention bonuses of \$700 for workers who remain on the job one month.” (London Free Press November 24, 2006)
- *Unemployment Rate Falls to 30 Year Low* (The Globe and Mail, January 3, 2007)

With headlines and statements like these, many businesses believe finding top employees is just a dream. They consider themselves lucky just to find a warm body. However, during times like this it is more important than ever to find Top Performers.

With the re-entry of “poor performing” employees into the workforce and the cost of labour skyrocketing, it is critical to find, hire and retain quality staff who provide a better return on your payroll investment.

According to research conducted by Frank Schmidt and John Hunter (Source: “The validity and utility of selection methods in personnel psychology: Practical and theoretical implications of 85 years of research findings” Psychological Bulletin, Sept 1998, Vol. 124, No. 2, pp 262-274.), Top Performers make up about 16% of the workforce and,

- Top performing unskilled/semiskilled workers perform **38% better** than poor performers.
- Top performing skilled employees perform **64% better** than their poor performing colleagues.
- Top performing managers perform **96% better** than poor managers.

Organizations cannot afford to accept mediocrity. They must have as many Top Performers in their business as possible.

The rules for attracting, hiring and retaining Top Performers are changing.

First off, you have to know and understand **what makes Top Performers different** in your organization. Sure they are the productive ones, but how do they differ from their less productive colleagues? What are their qualities? What motivates them? What are their interests outside work? Where do they hang out? Which media do they rely on for information about work opportunities? The answers may not always be obvious, so it is important to engage your current Top Performers to help you understand what makes potential Top Performers tick. Employee assessments may also help. (To learn how to identify characteristics of Top Performers contact the author, [bill@gilbertassociates.ca](mailto:bill@gilbertassociates.ca)) for the article, *What's the Difference?*) When you know and understand your Top Performers you can develop marketing strategies to appeal to your future Top Performers.

**The talent search has to be ongoing.** You want to find Top Performers when you have a vacancy, but that may not be when the Top Performers are conducting their active job search. Even if the timing matches, it is difficult to identify which medium they will be searching. The answer is to always be on the lookout. Always be seeking Top Performers by offering an attractive workplace, through word of mouth, through networking by you and your current Top Performers (birds of a feather flock together) and always be accepting applications. As well, it is important that you have a process in place to identify which applicants are Top Performers. Always respond immediately to all applicants – even when there is no current vacancy. Set a positive impression. If possible, bring the Top Performers on board when they are wanting. If this is not feasible, stay in touch so you can recruit them when you are ready.

**The time it takes to make a decision is of the essence.** Top Performers are in demand. Have a process in place to work through the hiring process effectively and quickly. Know what is negotiable and what isn't. Keep the key decision maker in the loop and available – so deals can be negotiated and decided quickly. Like the perfect house in the perfect location, there may be other buyers (employers) making offers. Sometimes, hours make a difference between hiring the right person and missing the opportunity. Remember the difference in productivity – the focus is worth it.

**Appeal to the needs and wants of Top Performers.** Sure good money is important to Top Performers, but that is a given. They are looking not only at the total compensation package but also opportunities to satisfy other needs. Compensation is more than salary or wages. It may include benefits, vacation, sick days, perks (like cars or parking spaces), pension, profit sharing, etc. Other needs include a workplace that will encourage them to develop their skills, that will challenge them, that will be stimulating and that will provide opportunities for growth.

Tim Brennan, Chief Visionary Officer of Talent Seeker, suggests different age brackets require different approaches.

For example *Kidemployees* (ages 15 – 25) want to work primarily evenings and weekends and are going to, or thinking of going to, school. To recruit them you might promote:

- flexible scheduling.
- advancement opportunities.
- opportunities to learning a new skill set.
- your incentive-driven/fast-paced workplace.
- competitive wages.
- profit sharing.
- high tech tools.

On the other hand, the *Mature Generations* (ages 26 – 55) want full time work during core hours. To attract them you might promote:

- work/life balance.
- health benefits.
- profit sharing/attendance bonus.
- competitive wages.
- perks and status.

Finally, to attract the 55+ crowd you may want to offer opportunities:

- for social interaction.
- to supplement existing retirement funds.
- to make a contribution.
- for limited hours and time off for travel.

The current “shortage” of labour may make it harder to identify, recruit, hire and keep Top Performers, but it doesn’t lessen the importance of doing so. There is too much at stake to accept “poor performing” or “average performing” workers when it comes to productivity and profit.

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