

Meeting the Workforce Challenge in a Changed World



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The Challenge of a Changed World

The impact of the global pandemic has been far greater than anyone could have imagined. It has taken a toll in ways no one saw coming. Business will never be the same because people are no longer the same. It altered how people view everything - from home life to work. All who thought that things would get "back to normal" are beginning to understand there is no going back to the way things were.

Businesses of all sizes and across all industries have struggled to make sense of what this **new reality** means for their company. Miscues and false starts have caused some to hesitate to implement any real go-forward strategies. Second-guessing can cause loss of **valuable time** in making necessary adjustments to business plans.

Among the greatest struggles businesses are dealing with is the difficulty in **recruiting** and **retaining** a workforce that will keep the wheels of their business moving. While this is true for all businesses it is especially true for small companies. What can you, as a small business owner do to overcome this challenge?



Small Locally Owned Businesses

Often referred to as the 'mom-and-pops' these small businesses are the backbone of every community. Consumers are eager to show their support for their local shops and cafes. How, though, can they **compete** with the larger corporations who are paying higher wages and offering unmatched benefits to attract help from the already limited workforce pool?

Following are a few ideas and strategies that are working for some business owners. The hope is that these ideas, if not exactly feasible in your business, will at least spur the thought processes and generate other, workable ideas that you can implement.

The Missing Element

Many business owners have the misguided thought that employees are primarily motivated by wages and benefits, such as insurance. Yet, all research indicates that those are no longer the most important enticements for jobseekers. Employees want to work for a company that shares their **values** and mirrors their position on important matters. They want to feel **valued** themselves and know that they are **contributing** to the success of the business - and be recognized for it.

To sum up what people are looking for in one word: **CULTURE**. They want to work for a company that cares and is supportive in every way.

Creating an **atmosphere** at work that addresses these issues is imperative. Making this clear through the messaging used in job posts, to the hiring process and carried out throughout the workplace is **critical** to recruiting and retaining the personnel you are seeking.

Referrals are the single most important hiring tool you have so make sure your existing staff is happy and eager to tell others what a great place it is to work!



How do you create such a culture? **It starts with you.** Your attitude, your approach to your business and your staff, and your view and treatment of customers all play a part. You no doubt have stressors you deal with – especially now. It is not necessary to hide your stress and pretend everything is okay – your staff knows there are struggles to be faced. **Be real** but don't let stress cause an unpleasant working atmosphere. In fact, if you are **open and honest** with your staff – and **ask for their help and input** – they will respect you and appreciate you and your candor. You may be surprised at the support they offer, and the insights they provide.

Allowing for **flexibility** and **work-life balance** is also important – now more than ever before. Structuring work schedules that allow for employees to be available for their families' school activities, elderly parents, and other **life events** will help your efforts in *recruiting and keeping valuable staff*.

People want to feel a sense of **belonging**. Creating an atmosphere of **respect** and **appreciation** will go a long way to bolster employee contentment. Employees who feel **valued** by the company and coworkers are more likely to stay and have a desire to contribute to the success of the business. **Recognizing** each person for their efforts – however small – to helping your business grow and succeed will foster a spirit of **commitment** to the goals of your company.

*This is all tied into the **culture** that you and your organization create together – and it begins with your lead. If you are unsure how to go about creating and implementing a culture that will work for your business contact Blue Ridge Crossroads Small Business Development Center for assistance.*



Compensation and Benefits

While larger companies are offering previously unheard-of wages, this is not always a viable option for smaller businesses. It is also not necessary, as long as you are paying a competitive wage. Too much focus on financial incentives can send the **wrong message** to jobseekers. It can imply that your business views them as a commodity. This can lead to them feeling **expendable** and **unappreciated**.

This is not to say that incorporating some perks into an overall culture strategy is not a good thing. Make employee perks **meaningful** - to show appreciation for work well done, to demonstrate you value their life outside of work. Paid time off is a great incentive and a reward that employees truly **appreciate**.

Getting **referrals** from existing employees is one of the best ways to hire. People typically refer people who have a similar work ethic and value system. The applicant is more likely to accept an offer since they know what to expect and already have a connection.

>> Why not offer an employee bonus for referrals?

*For example - if a referred worker stays in your employ for at least four months (or six months, or whatever term you decide) the employee who referred them gets a **bonus** of \$250. Or a **day off**. It's a win-win for everyone.*



Service and Hospitality Businesses



Is your business dependent on the limited tourist season? While your ideal would be to hire someone, train them, and have them stay indefinitely - even for years - that may not be **realistic**. Recent surveys indicate that workers in service-related jobs are looking for other employment and don't want to feel 'stuck' in a service job. When you recognize that someone you hire is looking for other **opportunities** meeting this **head-on** may make the most sense. Showing that you are *willing to help them achieve their long-term goals* if they will *help you get through the season*, will help attract **eager, willing** help.

How can you help them? Give them time off to job hunt. Make arrangements with **other local businesses** for them to **job shadow** at their company (that's a win-win for both companies!). Support their pursuit of further **education** at a local college, by giving them a **flexible schedule** for school.



Safety

Safety has taken on a whole new meaning in today's workplace where employees may be genuinely **fearful** of getting sick or infecting loved ones at home with an illness. Creating an **environment** and instituting **rules** that provide a satisfactory **comfort level** for your employees and your customers is worth every ounce of effort you put into it. This is something in your control regardless of governmental regulations or health agency recommendations.

>> Why not ask your employees what will give them the sense of well-being they desire?

Finding Adequate Staffing

If it is necessary for you to find *local* help using large online job sites may not be the best option. Some have found success posting on **Craigslist** or other **local job boards**. An **attention-grabbing sign** out front can also be successful. (*Highlight your culture - not the pay.*) Work with your local **college** and **vocational** schools to find new talent.

*It may be beneficial to work with other area businesses or your local chamber of commerce to host a community **job fair**. Make it fun, exciting and worth attending – and promote it everywhere!*

In Summary

It is clear that the "tried and true" strategies for attracting and retaining employees are no longer working. We have entered a **new era** where the things that matter most to workers are non-financial:

- **Feeling Valued by their Employer**
- **Having a Sense of Belonging**
- **Having Caring and Trusting Teammates**

Creating an environment that supplies these things to your employees will **separate** you from your **competition** - who are still trying to lure help with dollars and perks. Implementing strategies that align your company's **vision** with the **values** jobseekers are looking for will help ensure that you have a dedicated team in place that will help move your business forward to meet your goals.

These are unusual times that call for solutions that previously were rejected as not viable. Opening your mind to new ideas will not only help you get through this difficult time but you likely will find that a better way of doing business has just been waiting to be discovered!





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