

CHAMBER CHATTER

Investing in Staff for Long-term Success

by Julianne Philpott

If you ask an accomplished businessperson the secret to his or her success, credit is almost always first given to his or her employees. Similarly, employee satisfaction often surrounds the relationship with his or her superior and coworkers, and the support offered by that team.

Best-selling author Dr. Bob Nelson once stated, “Take time to appreciate employees and they will reciprocate in a thousand ways.” When one closely examines what both employers and staff look for in the ideal job, the considerations are often the same. As much as staff hopes to see opportunity for advancement in an organization, employers strive to ensure the company they have worked so hard to build remains intact upon their departure. From an investment perspective, there are many steps both employers and staff can take together to guarantee current and future organizational success.

Simply put, highly educated and skilled employees are an organization’s greatest asset. The intrinsic benefits are endless, from the intangible such as passion, creativity and confidence to the concrete such as specific technical skills and knowledge.

It seems simple enough. However, many employers underestimate the impact that their frontline workers have on the bottom line. Studies show that there is a direct and quantifiable link between employee variables such as satisfaction, loyalty and commitment and an organization’s financial results. From a managerial and reputation management perspective, whether it’s answering the phone or presenting to a delegation of 500 attendees, the impact is quite similar. Investing in employee training to ensure staff is knowledgeable, articulate, productive and loyal will mean the difference in losing and securing a contract. Investing in the organization’s long-term staffing plan is key.

In the December edition of *Chamber Chatter*, we spoke of the Lower Churchill Hydroelectric Generation Project, and Labrador’s business readiness. We advised the business community to ask questions such as: *Is my business prepared to benefit from [such a project]?* And if not: *What steps need to be taken to make my business ready?* Nalcor stated that considerations should be made in relation to “price, quality, technical sustainability, service and delivery.” Nalcor’s statement is a critical one. In hopes of securing contracts on such a massive project, companies must address all considerations listed in relation to its product or service.

The world today is moving at a rapid pace, and to remain competitive, businesses must adapt quickly to ever-changing industry trends. From computer programming to overall qualifications of the workforce, progressions will occur in which ongoing training is a necessity. Decision-makers must look to the future with an optimistic eye to identify organizational gaps that may exist between today and the future. When employers provide staff with the opportunity to receive relevant and vital training, employers play a role in bridging that critical gap.

Aside from the more technical and commercial perspective, improvements in human resource capabilities are also required due to expansions in healthcare, manufacturing, natural resources, service and private business sectors. Residential construction and extensions to facilities such as the local hospital is certainly a step in the right direction toward community preparedness. As critical investments are made to infrastructure, attention must also be given to the workforce.

In relation to organizational preparedness, companies must respond to the question: *What’s in it for me?* Perhaps potential employees are interested in securing a position that includes an attractive benefits package, or maybe the incentive lies among the extent of experience to be gained. Inducement

also lies within simpler considerations such as flexibility and life amenities. In any case, the onus is undoubtedly on the company to effectively communicate the motivation of wanting to become a part of that team.

A major incentive to many is the opportunity for advancement. The potential for growth within an organization may be one of the most important considerations for job seekers when embarking on the search for a long-term and sustainable career. Aside from the fast-approaching retirement age of the “baby boomer” generation at which time positions over many sectors will need to be filled, succession planning may also be key. Often narrowly referred to as “replacement planning,” it involves identifying individuals internal to an organization to assume leadership and managerial roles as roles need to be filled. To establish effective succession planning candidates are identified, critical characteristics and qualities are also identified, and training opportunities for career advancement are then provided to help address qualities needed. Admittedly, both pros and cons exist that have been associated with this type of planning, the most success arising within privately-owned businesses.

Although sometimes difficult to discover, there are a number of provincial and federal wage subsidy programs that have been created to substantially offset costs and aid employers in the recruitment and retention of staff. For example, the Department of Human Resources, Labour and Employment (HRLE) offers a wage subsidy program to assist organizations recruit recent post-secondary graduates. As an added benefit, this program also offers training allowances of up to \$500 to assist employers with skills development of the candidate.

Other training programs are available under organizations such as the Labrador Aboriginal Training Partnership (LATP), established to assist in improving labour market outcomes and provide support amongst regional aboriginal groups relating to not only the Lower Churchill Hydroelectric Generation Project, but other industrial developments as well. This partnership includes \$30M in funding for Labrador aboriginal training including a Training-to-Employment Plan and certification and job placement support. In addition, the LATP also funds programs related to firefighter and carpentry training. Other organizations are also taking large steps toward the preparation of the labour force including the programs offered by the College of the North Atlantic (CNA) and substantial training initiatives monitored by federal and provincial government agencies.

The point to take away from this article is two-fold. First, investing in skilled staff is an absolute necessity to ensure future organizational preparedness and success. Secondly, many programs are available to financially assist organizations in the effort to attract and retain these skilled workers. Newfoundland and Labrador has been much affected by out-migration as those living in the province consider the advantages of accepting work elsewhere to be much greater. By taking the necessary steps to respond to this persistent issue, and motivating currently skilled as well as potential staff to commit to long-term employment within an organization, we will find endless intrinsic benefits for both the organization and its employees.