

Agency: Tennessee Housing Development Agency
2008 Entry: Management Innovation - HR

Category: The Three R's of HR

Management Challenge

Recruiting and retaining the best employees is the goal of every Human Resources Division. Stir in the strategic plan of fostering a fun, rewarding work environment for its employees and a challenge is issued. Tennessee Housing Development Agency has a menu of strategies titled "The Three R's of HR." The R's are Recruiting, Retention and Recognition. Employees are smiling and turnover is down since last year while production moves at record pace. The improvements have made the task of finding and keeping the right person easier. These strategies help staff find more job satisfaction by becoming more confident, empowered, and focused, resulting in a more productive, innovative, and energetic workforce. There is a strong commitment from the Executive Director and Senior Leadership with a genuine belief in the people devoted to creating a great workplace.

Recruiting

The HR Specialist was designated as the lead HR person responsible for THDA's recruiting needs. The Division has centralized and formalized many of the recruiting processes, from job description rewrites to the "onboarding" of new employees, in order to ensure consistency, professionalism and uniformity throughout the organization. (THDA's HR and Legal Division recently completed a Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) Self Audit, updating all Job Descriptions and evaluating FLSA exempt classifications.)

Those who supervise employees at THDA are part of the Leadership team. At the beginning of the hiring process a **Recruiting Menu** is distributed to the Leadership member. It includes options for posting the position, defining the level of HR involvement desired (from screening resumes to participating in interviews), a checklist of mandatory items, including reference checks and offer letters. The Menu has formalized and improved communication between HR and Leadership, giving clear direction and responsibilities. It has served to better equip Leadership to focus on finding the right person.

HR has developed relationships with recruiting resources in the area - career centers, colleges and universities (particularly through erecruiting.com), job fairs, and networking with other area recruiters in order to focus proactively on a pool of resources matching THDA's needs. This helps save time for THDA compared to the traditional recruiting resources. The same efforts are underway to staff our remote offices.

Staff members have their own networks, as do our industry partners. Vacancies are posted in THDA's daily staff newsletter, *THDA Today* and THDA has created an Employment Opportunities page on its website, with a dedicated email account (jobs@thda.org) for receipt of resumes.

HR sends the Leadership member a set of Interview Questions and Guidelines. This ensures consistency and helps interviewers ask questions within the guidelines of state and federal employment laws and regulations. A Phone Screening List and a Reference Checking List smooths the process. Internally, HR has created and updated templates for offer letters, appointment letters, job ads, and employment advertising procedures. HR has improved the turnaround time in which all candidates are sent a letter promptly, thanking them for their application.

HR confirms interviews via email to the candidate, including who, when, and where, and a copy of the Job Description. At the interview, each candidate receives a THDA logo folder that includes our Mission, Vision, and Values Statement, a Benefits List, the Job Description, and a business card with contact information. Candidates should know a lot about us before the first visit.

When an offer is accepted, HR sends a New-Hire Checklist to the Leadership member, giving step-by-step instructions for preparing for the new hire's first day.

Retention

A new employee is greeted with a personalized “Welcome to THDA” sign in the main lobby upon their arrival and an announcement in *THDA Today*. HR’s onboarding activities include a one-on-one orientation reviewing policies and procedures with an overview of benefit options. Two binders are provided: one covering benefits, policies, and procedures, the second describing resources in the community. New employees are scheduled to be taken to lunch by the Executive Director and members of the HR Division. THDA also holds a quarterly group new employee orientation. New hires gather for an informal program that includes meeting the executive staff, division directors, learning about the organization’s “big picture,” and hearing about what makes THDA a great place to work. A slide presentation, *What’s So Great About Working at THDA*, is presented that includes photos of fun events and activities and snapshots of benefits. The slide show is also used at career fairs.

THDA continually emphasizes a sense of family in our internal culture. THDA’s Social Committee includes one or more members of the HR Division including the chairperson. We offer a monthly Donut Day, including bagels and fruit, free to the staff. Donut Day has evolved into D&B (Donuts and Benefits) to encompass the addition of a presentation provided in conjunction with the chow. Staff can grab a donut and run or stay for some or all of a presentation provided by a subject-matter expert covering a benefit available to staff as a state employee or as a state resident. Staff attendance has ranged from 30 employees to 60 at each session. Topics have included the State Tuition Waiver Program, Retirement Benefits, Credit Union, Department of Tourism, EAP, and Employee Wellness.

Although not a new endeavor, the Social Committee additionally plans at least one THDA-wide activity per month. Activities range from themed pot-lucks to the Gutter Buster Classic (bowling outing) to the Big Gulp (golf outing). An annual picnic takes place during the workday. The 2007 picnic was one of the most successful ever – enjoyed at an indoor location with games and air conditioning. The traditional annual Christmas/Holiday party was enhanced in 2007 to become the annual Employee Appreciation Luncheon, occurring at Opryland’s Gaylord Resort. There was essentially 100% attendance at the annual events.

Inclusion efforts have been emphasized to promote and encourage inclusion by the 25% of the staff that serves in remote offices. The HR staff has formed teams and visited the field offices to share D&B information, policy updates, and to provide opportunities for these individuals to ask questions and get to know HR. A special regional event was provided, entitled Section 8 RAW (Rental Assistance Workshops), in which a full day’s presentations were conducted at two locations in Eastern and Western parts of the state. RAW included presentations by the three health insurance vendors, an EAP work-life balance program, retirement planning, Email Etiquette, etc. Field staff is now invited to participate via phone in central office meetings, including monthly Leadership meetings, Policy Review Sessions, and Leadership Development Series trainings.

The executive director initiated a 12-month Leadership Development Series (LDS) through a presentation - “Defining Leadership at THDA.” Emphasis was placed on promoting empowerment and creativity with staff, scheduling regular staff meetings, having face-to-face conversations in lieu of emails, and supporting staff participation in THDA activities.

A fresh emphasis on training and development includes centralizing these functions and converting a position into a full-time Training and Development Coordinator. This demonstrated THDA’s strong support of professional development and appreciation for continuing education. This position has been responsible for not only enrolling staff in training and facilitating training, but also for the D&B programs and LDS. THDA held its first-ever Senior Staff Retreat (19 Leadership members participated, all

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Directors through Executive Director), taking place offsite with two days of teambuilding activities emphasizing communication and teamwork.

Recognition

THDA continually makes an effort to recognize staff for their service to the organization. At each board of directors' meeting, staff who have reached a milestone service anniversary are invited to lunch with the board, and are presented with a certificate. They have their photos taken with the executive director and their division director, and are recognized in *THDA Today*. Staff now receive a gift of either a THDA logo item (2008's first: a personalized Howard Miller clock) or their choice from the state's anniversary gifts.

Birthdays have been recognized for the past several years through a card personally signed and hand delivered by the Executive Director.

A Professional and Civic Organization Membership Policy was developed to facilitate the professional growth of THDA staff and enhance THDA's reputation among the professional and civic community within which it works. Reimbursements are made for memberships in professional organizations up to a specified annual limit. Sixteen staff have used this benefit.

Ongoing actions have been taken to promote and encourage professional development. In addition to having access to the State's Tuition Waiver Program and THDA's Continuing Education Program, a Professional Development Policy was added which recognizes and rewards individuals who obtain qualifying professional certifications and educational achievements. Eight staff have achieved these increases.

Retirements are celebrated at THDA. A checklist has been created for each event that includes a timeline and a budget for ordering flowers, cake and refreshments, and a retirement gift. Retirees invite family and friends to the party. Parties include speeches by the executive director, division director, friends and colleagues. The retiree is also recognized in the *THDA Today*.

Each of these activities can be replicated by an agency that cares for its employees, that prefers an engaged and energized work force. The costs of retaining great employees is measurably less than the constant churn of recruiting and training new employees. The production from an empowered employee outshines the learning curve of a disinterested one.

One of THDA's values is a fun, rewarding work environment for its employees and that enhances its mission of creating safe, sound, affordable housing opportunities. THDA's "Three R's of HR" – Recruiting, Retention, and Recognition – have brought the organization to a whole new level of refinement.

Supporting Documentation

Recruiting Menu, Interview Questions, What's So Great about THDA slides, Welcome sign.