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IN DEPTH: OFFICE ENVIRONMENTS

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Management

Create pleasant, productive office to retain workers in tight market

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Work environments of the future can be pleasant places for productivity if employers take strong action to hire aggressively, train fervently and discipline poor performers relentlessly.

Statistical survey

Recent workplace statistics from a variety of sources are a bit frightening:

- The U.S. labor force is predicted to grow 12 percent from 2000 to 2010. During the same period, the number of jobs will grow almost 17 percent.
- By the year 2030, 60 percent of Texans will have only a high school diploma or less.
- At the management level of job applicants, there are shortcomings in conceptual skills, communication and problem solving skills. That's of particular concern, because by 2013, nearly 40 percent of U.S. jobs will be professional or managerial.
- Up to half of American employees are ready to pounce on better job opportunities if they come along in the next two years. The average replacement cost for each: \$50,000. If 30 percent of Americans act on that desire for change, employers could face collective turnover costs of \$590 billion.
- The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission received 14,396 charges of sexual harassment in fiscal year 2002. Almost 15 percent of those charges were filed by males. The EEOC resolved 15,792 sexual harassment charges in FY 2002 and recovered \$50.3 million in monetary benefits for charging parties and other aggrieved individuals (not including monetary benefits obtained through litigation).
- Of the approximately 12.3 million illicit drug users in the United States, 77 percent are employed.
- For every 1,000 employees, there are 84 problem drinkers.
- About 65 percent of employees say they have abused their access to technology at work.

Competitive edge

That's right! In the next 10 years, employers will be scrambling to find employees, particularly ones that are skilled to fulfill professional and managerial positions. Compounding those problems are the cold hard facts of substance abuse, computer abuse, sexual harassment, employee theft, and workplace aggression costing organizations billions of dollars on an annual basis.

To sustain a competitive edge in the marketplace, employers must capitalize on three opportunities to maximize employee performance as well as to protect the organization from potential liability:

- **Hiring.** The first opportunity lies within their organizational hiring processes, utilizing a battery of assessment tests, behavioral-based interviewing and a comprehensive review of applications, resumes and background checks to screen and select candidates. The value of the dollars, time and energy spent at the front door more than outweighs the costs spent in dealing with employee problems after they're

hired or in settling lawsuits from applicants who were not selected for employment.

- Retention. The second opportunity for maximizing employee performance is to provide targeted training and coaching opportunities to employees who have both the abilities and motivation to learn and grow with the company.

Some employers feel that providing training opportunities for their employees is a risky venture, turning their workplaces into a training ground from which talented and trained employees springboard to other positions with other employers. The truth is, employers who fail to provide training and development opportunities to further grow their talented staff, find themselves losing their talented employees anyway to organizations who place a high value on employee training.

Worse yet, these same employers could soon find themselves with a workforce poorly trained and ill-equipped to handle market changes or innovate existing products, services or processes.

This isn't a battle cry to send all employees to training. Unfortunately, some employees placed in training programs for professional development purposes have neither the ability nor the desire to learn, and no amount of training will ever make the difference with these employees as long as they remain within company walls. Better to move these employees who drain company resources and morale on to the third opportunity to maximize performance -- termination.

- Termination. Careful here -- termination is the most litigious area of employment practices. One of the major culprits is the lack of training provided to supervisors. More often than not, supervisors are promoted with little to no managerial experience or on-the-job coaching in their new supervisory positions and are left to learn by the seat of their pants. The results can be disastrous.

Training

Without knowledge of effective hiring practices, supervisors can place candidates who poorly match the company and job into critical positions, setting these employees up for failure and putting others and the organization at risk. At a minimum, supervisors need training in effective hiring processes, disciplinary procedures and counseling techniques to maximize opportunities for performance and productivity as well as minimize organizational liability.

Better yet -- provide training to those employees in the organization slated for future supervisory positions, giving them a head start on learning effective supervisory practices before they earn the promotion.

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