

Ottawa business executives share some of their expert advice and insights on human resource issues. January's Topic: HR Resolutions. Our business executives this month were asked to share their number one recommendation for anyone coming into an HR role this year.

by Patricia Heard

## Resolution 1: Improve Attraction and Retention Methods

With discriminating employees shopping for the right company, employers competing for hard-to-find skill sets have to work harder at selling their sizzle! **Pierre Girard, Corporate Human Resources Director from Brigil**, says the biggest problem in today's market is attraction and retention of employees. "It's very different from when I first

started my career in Human Resources twenty three years ago," said Mr. Girard. "Back then I had my Question and Answer sheet to quiz potential employees with, today they are interviewing ME and I'm presenting them with a Welcome Package about the quality of life at Brigil!"

Retention is more difficult today too as generation X and Y-ers can seem to be willing to make a leap into a different company for a small pay upgrade. Brigil has set a goal to be the top employer in the region by 2010. To achieve this, they are looking at their many retention strategies such as personal training programs, flex hour shifts, performance bonuses, subsidized employee fitness memberships and considering changes they should make like perhaps bringing the gym right into their building. Career counseling and education for internal advancement of employees, corporate discounts for employees from local retailers, years of services recognition program, and other strategies add to career satisfaction and have helped increase retention of valued employees at Brigil.

## Resolution 2: Be Flexible

"The best piece of advice I would give a new HR manager today," says **Tara Sevigny, Administrative Manager at Grand & Toy**, "is Be Flexible!" When employees have to change their schedule, she'll accommodate them whenever possible and she strives to create a positive, supportive and

fun work environment. And it shows in the relaxed and friendly faces of employees at this busy office!

Five years ago Ms. Sevigny moved into the role of Administrative Manager at Grand & Toy. "We were in the middle of a huge renovation," she recalls, "and the main focus of the changes was to create an office that was more employee-centered. Where it used to be all about doing your job – clocking-in and clocking-out, we've created a more healthy balance." Today the Grand & Toy offices are a sleek sea of colourful cubicals for a variety of call-centre staff, administrators, and others. Ms. Sevigny works hard to cultivate a fun workplace with special interest days like Ugly Sweater Day, Stupid Slipper Day and even an Office Olympics to keep employees engaged and having fun. Office Olympics, held during the Beijing Olympics, included events such as: Office Chair Relays, Calculator add-offs, Javelin Straw-Throwing and was complete with medal award ceremonies – all organized by the new Social Committee. At Grand & Toy, work seems to be a lot of fun and new candidates are impressed by the atmosphere and environment right away. Add the flexibility and understanding to the mix, and employees at Grand & Toy end up more satisfied and productive.

## Resolution 3: Update Your Measuring Stick

“Dude – the powder’s good until 2...” **Judy Green, Manager, Marketing & Communications** for the **Canadian Library Association**, uses this quote from a presentation by Jim Carroll to illustrate her resolution. “HR managers today have to know what makes work attractive for candidates – and it’s not the 9-5 lifestyle, with 40 years at the same job,” said Ms. Green. Companies that routinely expect employees to make work the most important thing in their lives are going to be in for a shock. The new graduates watched older relatives give everything to work only to die of heart attacks in the year of their retirement – when life was supposed to begin. And they vow that’s not going to be them.

So, with the demand for work-life balance taking precedent and the new breed of worker looking for more than a pay cheque, companies are going to have to compete for talent in a whole new way. “This is a very different ride for anyone in HR today,” Ms. Green states. “And what’s it going to look like in 2011? It’s going to be tough to find a candidate.” Good thing senior executives are used to change and adaptation Ms. Green says. Having made so many adjustments already – computers, cell phones, the internet, to name just a few – senior players understand adapting to the changing demands of a new workforce is also a necessity.

## BONUS Resolution: Understand and Communicate

**Véronique Duvieusart, CHRP** and **Associate Director of Human Resources** at the **University of Ottawa** offers her personal recommendation for new HR managers. “It’s important to understand the business you are in when you come into a new role,” said Ms. Duvieusart. “Beyond the business though, you must understand your corporate culture in order to

be effective in HR.” Understanding how decisions have been made and communicated in the past, as well as the audience you are dealing with, plays into your ability to successfully implement new programs and policies.

Having someone from a university recommend research isn’t surprising, but this makes huge business sense. Consider a group of engineers for example, who would react to a proposed change differently than a group of corporate trainers. No matter the group, understanding the players, opening dialogue and building trust and credibility, will allow you to achieve improved buy-in to change. Without this understanding, there are minefields ahead you won’t even see until you’re into the heat of a battle you don’t want!

## Manager’s Tip of the Month

It’s always good to do a basic refresher of the rules once everyone gets back on board after the holidays. This lets everyone know that despite perhaps some extra leniency during the break, the holiday party or whatever, it is back to business as usual. Mike Cutler, Production Manager at StairWorld Inc. in Ottawa says, “A procedures review – just basic reminders about time off requests, general house keeping issues, lateness, last minute appointments, things like that - is always part of my first meeting with the team after a major holiday. Helps get everyone back on track and understand that we are back to business as usual.”

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255 Metcalfe Street, Suite 702, Ottawa, ON K2P 1P9 • 613-238-2233 or email:

[patricia@pollackgroup.com](mailto:patricia@pollackgroup.com)

**NEXT MONTH: KEEPING THE LOVE ALIVE**