

## Education and workforce development column

# Building your own workforce

*An investment now can pay huge dividends  
in building the workforce you need*



**John  
Vanderkin**  
*Employers  
Overload*

As the President of a successful staffing company and a volunteer board member for SWWDC and PIC; I have the enviable task of working closely with job seekers and local businesses looking for qualified employees. In fact, as our business continues to grow I have also enjoyed the task of looking for qualified employees to fill internal positions within our company.

These varied experiences offer me a keen perspective into the current challenges facing many of today's job seekers and the businesses that so desperately need employees. Over the last few years there has been a great deal of talk about the "skills gap"; there are numerous jobs available but few job seekers with the skills required for the job. This skills gap is a very real challenge for positions requiring specific education or training such as nursing, computer programming, engineering and other technical positions and we need the help of educators to close this gap. For semi-skilled positions it might be time for the business community to make a different type of investment in the workforce so we can close that portion of the gap.

I regularly meet with potential employers, trying to fill semi-skilled positions, who say they cannot find qualified candidates or the candidates they do hire aren't a good fit. Often times the employer can't find the candidates with the specific skill set, experience and work ethic they require. The employer is frustrated because the skilled candidates they attract end up leaving for higher pay or don't work out because their attitude, work ethic or interpersonal skills disrupt the production of the team.

Given this hiring challenge, it may be time to go back to a proven technique. A solution that has been extremely beneficial to our business as well as some of the companies we work with. I am confident that your investment in this approach will be less than expected and yield better results than you are currently seeing. First of all, identify the key "soft skills"; attitude, personality and character traits; an employee really needs to be successful in the position you are filling. Second, identify the minimum "hard skills"; mechanical aptitude, strong math skills, etc...; to be successful. Third, identify the best person on your team to train a new employee to perform the tasks, and most importantly, adopt and embrace your company culture and core values. This person may not be your strongest skilled employee but someone who has great communication skills, is a trusted employee who understands the tasks that need to be performed and the skills and attitude required to be successful in your organization.

Utilize your internal recruiter or a successful staffing company to help you recruit, screen and identify candidates who have those soft and hard skills identified above. Identify the best candidates to bring into your business and utilize your training person to assess them and get them up to speed quickly. A good trainer will know very quickly if the employee has the "right stuff" to become successful for you. If you are nervous about hiring them directly, use a staffing company to hire them as a temporary employee until they prove themselves. I promise you, there are many people in the job market who have a great work ethic, strong interpersonal skills and some of the basic skills you require. Given half a chance, they will learn the tasks you need performed, will typically start at the beginning wage rate and their level of commitment to your organization will be much higher than a skilled person looking for a higher wage. A little investment now can pay huge dividends in building the workforce you need today and into the future.