Talent Solutions – New Approaches to Recruitment and Retention

A Report from WCA's Talent Solutions Group and
Workforce Development Committee
March 2023

Executive Summary: Talent acquisition has changed drastically in recent years for several reasons. The Covid-19 pandemic caused massive layoffs followed by the Great Resignation with record numbers of workers retiring or changing jobs and careers for more pay and a better work-life balance. When the economy started to recover employers increased wages, benefits and work flexibility and decreased education and experience requirements to attract and keep talent. At the same time, many job seekers remained on the sidelines because they couldn't find or afford child care or they were unable to return to work during the pandemic due to health concerns. Recently, employment levels have returned to pre-pandemic levels. However, the number of job openings are near the record high and employers continue to face unrelenting recruitment and retention challenges. This report uses recent NYS Department of Labor surveys, Mercer research and insights from WCA talent initiatives to identify strategies employers can use to improve recruitment and retention outcomes. As a whole, the report is designed to help employers better understand what the key recruitment and retention issues are and what strategies can be used to address them – and significantly improve outcomes.

Would you like me to give you a formula for success? It's quite simple, really: Double your rate of failure. You are thinking of failure as the enemy of success. But it isn't at all. You can be discouraged by failure, or you can learn from it, so go ahead and make mistakes. Make all you can. Because remember, that's where you will find success. **– Thomas J. Watson**

Report and Recommendations: This report focuses on recruitment and retention challenges and opportunities and offers recommendations. Recruitment is covered more because it is the bigger challenge facing most employers. However, some recruitment strategies can also be used for retention. It is also important to continuously improve the strategies used to optimize results and remain competitive.

Reviewing recent surveys and research helps to understand what the issues are and how to address them. Chris White, Deputy Commissioner for Workforce Development, NYS Department of Labor and a panelist at WCA's 2022 Workforce Development Summit recently presented results on job seeker and business surveys to the Westchester-Putnam Workforce Development Board. The report features the survey findings. Following are responses covering incentives, supports, barriers, training and sourcing candidates.

Incentives: Knowing what incentives are important to job seekers helps to develop better recruitment strategies. This list ranks the top 10 incentives:

Incentives

What work options/incentives would you like employers to offer?

Reason (statewide)	%
Paid time off	38%
Higher pay / higher starting pay	36%
Ability to work remotely full-time	33%
Ability to work remotely some of the time	31%
Flexibility to choose my own hours	31%
Fewer days of work per week with same overall pay	29%
Ability to only work during the week	27%
Ability to work early in the morning	21%
Promotional opportunities	19%
A promise of potential future earnings based on performance	18%

Source: NYS Department of Labor

The responses covered pay, work flexibility, time off, promotions and performance incentives. Most employers have already increased pay and benefits which were ranked highest by responders.

Recommendation #1: Promotional opportunities and performance rewards are ranked lowest but including and combining them with other incentives should help you attract more candidates. Telling job candidates about promotional and pay raise opportunities during the interview process can be very compelling for the interviewee and help increase offer acceptance rates. Furthermore, most of these incentives, if added or enhanced, should be included in retention strategies.

Supports: They are also an important part of the equation. We all know taxes, housing, child care and transportation costs are very high in our region. The job seeker survey identifies what supports are offered by employers and what are desired by employees.

Support Services: Statewide

Support services for workers (All industries)	%	Support services desired (All industries)	%
Education/tuition assistance or reimbursement	40%	N/A	37%
N/A	39%	Child care assistance	36%
Mental health support	37%	Transportation assistance	26%
Transportation assistance	13%	Education/tuition assistance or reimbursement	24%
Access to low- or no-cost legal services	12%	Mental health support	16%
Child care assistance	7%	Debt repayment	14%
		Access to low- or no-cost legal services	7%

Source: NYS Department of Labor

Other noteworthy takeaways. First, on the left chart, you will see that employers put tuition assistance and mental health support at the top of the list of services offered to workers but the right chart represents what workers are looking for and they are more interested in child care and transportation assistance. Second, the percentage gaps are significant, showing that employers and workers are not on

the same page. It is also important to consider that these types of benefits will vary based on industry and income level.

Recommendation #2 – Employers should adjust their support services to match the needs of potential and existing employees. It doesn't always require covering all the costs or providing all the supports in-house. For example, some employers partner with local child care centers and offer subsidies to employees. Another option is to help employees access supports provided by nonprofits like the Child Care Council of Westchester which offers generous child care scholarships based on income. Additionally, consider offering or increasing transportation support. This could include a monthly or yearly stipend for car or train expenses or parking if the office does not have free parking. These supports should also be factored into retention strategies.

Job Seeker Barriers: Knowing what is preventing job seekers from applying for jobs helps to identify opportunities to reduce or eliminate the barriers as part of your recruitment strategies. Here are 14 barriers that are shrinking your talent pool.

Barriers to employment

Barrier	Statewide		Mid-Hudson	
	Mild	Severe	Mild	Severe
I face discrimination due to my age	28%	16%	31%	19%
I don't have enough experience in the field	27%	9%	26%	10%
I don't have the right degree, certificate or credential	27%	13%	27%	12%
I don't have a large professional network	27%	12%	28%	12%
I don't have enough modern / digital skills	25%	10%	24%	9%
I have insufficient education or training	25%	8%	23%	9%
I have gaps in employment	18%	5%	19%	5%
I'm unable to practice for potential job interview questions	17%	4%	15%	3%
I'm unable to access technology to work remotely	17%	6%	16%	5%
I'm unable to create cover letters and resumes	16%	5%	14%	5%
I don't have access to reliable transportation	14%	5%	11%	4%
I'm unable to access the Internet to search for jobs	13%	4%	11%	2%
I have a disability	10%	3%	11%	2%
I don't have access to reliable child / elder care	9%	5%	8%	4%

Source: NYS Department of Labor

Many employers have already reduced education and experience requirements and don't question gaps in employment as much as they did previously. Child care and transportation were covered in the supports services section.

Recommendation #3: Make it clear to job seekers that your organization seeks older experience workers, people with disabilities and other groups that are underrepresented in the workforce like veterans, immigrants, Blacks, Hispanics and even formerly incarcerated and recovering addicts. Combined, recruiting from these groups vastly enlarges your pool of candidates and makes it easier to reach your diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility (DEIA) goals. Partnering with nonprofits that serve these groups like AARP, ACCES-VR (serve people with disabilities) and many local nonprofits like Neighbors Link and LUCA (serve immigrants) makes it much easier to recruit talent and create talent pipelines. Additionally, The STEM Alliance provides tech skills training, computers and internet service to those in need. Westchester County also has several departments focused on underserved populations. Furthermore, NYS Department of Labor, Westchester County Department of Social Services and Career Centers as well as college, university and BOCES career service centers provide workshops and training to overcome other barriers and can be strong recruitment partners. Also, most employers don't know that

NYS Department of Labor, Empire State Development and State Education Department have tax credits, services and staff for employers who target these groups and there are many nonprofits who train and provide support services to them. WCA has worked with these entities and can help employers collaborate or partner with them. Equally important, employers like Candela Systems have developed an in-house program that trains people for their hard to fill positions. They have also created an employee coach position to have someone focused on working individually and collectively with employees to make sure they are heard and valued and to help the employer understand what they can do to improve retention.

Flipping this over, employers identified what skills job candidates are missing:

Common **skills lacking** among job applicants and new employees

Non-Technical Skills (all industries, statewide)	2021	2022
Self-motivation	64%	70%
Timeliness/attendance	51%	55%
Communication skills	66%	52%
Attention to detail	58%	50%
Problem-solving/critical thinking	63%	48%
Time management	44%	32%
Ability to take criticism	40%	31%
Personal awareness	34%	27%
Teamwork	31%	24%
Customer service	24%	19%
English skills/grammar	31%	19%
Leadership	28%	18%
Conflict management	33%	17%
Decision-making	27%	16%
Basic math skills	30%	15%

Common **skills lacking** among job applicants and new employees

Technical Skills (all industries, statewide)	2021	2022
Basic computer use/computer literacy	47%	44%
Software proficiency in Excel	39%	32%
Mechanical technical / engineering	23%	19%
Email	19%	19%
Software proficiency in Word	23%	17%
Data analysis	15%	16%
Typing	19%	16%

Source: NYS Department of Labor

This information is valuable to employers who have their own training or partner with other providers who help job seekers acquire these skills.

Employer Barriers to Hiring Candidates: The other side of the coin illustrates what challenges employers are dealing with. Focusing on the following Mid-Hudson Region responses, many positions are hard to fill for the same reasons identified by job seekers like lack of experience and skills and work schedules.

Why roles are difficult to fill

Reason (Statewide)	%	Reason (Mid-Hudson Region)	%
Lack of qualified candidates	49%	Compensation	50%
Compensation	42%	Lack of qualified candidates	47%
Lack of applicants	23%	Applicants lack skills	19%
Shift / schedule	17%	Nature of work	18%
Applicants lack skills	16%	Shift/Schedule	16%
People aren't interested in work	16%	Lack of applicants	16%
Nature of work	14%	Lack of experience	13%
Lack of experience	14%	People aren't interested in work	12%

Source: NYS Department of Labor

Several of these barriers like compensation, work flexibility and broadening your talent pool have already been discussed.

Recommendation # 4: Another way to address the lack of skills and experience besides partnering with other organizations is to establish or expand and enhance your internship program. Some colleges like Mercy partner with employers to provide students with paid internships. It's important to recognize that many students who attend local colleges are working part- or full-time to pay for tuition. About 1/3 of the students who attend these colleges are also foreign-born or first-generation students who often lack networks that lead to internship and job opportunities. Employers who have strong internship programs are much more likely to end up with talent pipelines that help them fill open positions.

Sourcing Talent: A variety of other strategies are being used by employers to reach and recruit more job candidates. Included in the survey are:

Finding Talent

Popular Recruitment Tools (Statewide, All industries)	%	Most Successful Recruitment Tool (Statewide, All industries)	%
Word of mouth / Networking through current employees / Referrals	58%	Word of mouth / Networking through current employees / Referrals	57%
Indeed	53%	Indeed	50%
Company website	46%	Company website	18%
Facebook	37%	Facebook	14%
NYS Dept. of Labor/NYS Job Bank/	35%	Third-party recruiter / head-hunter / staffing firm	14%
LinkedIn	30%		
Third-party recruiter / head-hunter / staffing firm	24%		
In-person career fairs	12%		

Source: NYS Department of Labor

The lists have the same four tools at the top. Clearly, these are the ones to focus on.

Recommendation #5: In general, your talent sourcing should be a dynamic, not static process. Specifically, identifying and using various sources to diversify where you are getting your candidates from is key. Be strategic and review regularly where you are getting your hires from. Focus on people,

places, programs, or sources where you have received the most quality workers. Using LinkedIn to advertise jobs is becoming more and more beneficial. For some job listings you may get excellent results and on other job listings it may reach a more appropriate audience in a newspaper rather than on social media. Facebook is also a great place to promote your organization and spotlight your talent to help attract more talent. The number of in-person recruitment events, either on-campus, on-site or hosted by another organization were greatly reduced during Covid-19 for health reasons. However, they continue to be a very useful way to meet candidates and advertise that you are hiring. More on this in the WCA Initiatives section.

Several articles were researched to identify other strategies. An article by Job Adder listed 21 strategies. The Talent Solutions Workgroup **recommends the seven strategies below**:

1. Do more social media recruiting
2. Offer incentives for employee referrals
3. Write more enticing job descriptions
4. Make more use of LinkedIn, Handshake and other job platforms
5. Make your website and job listings more mobile friendly
6. Make interviews less stressful for candidates
7. Cultivate the ideal talent pipeline (invest in partnerships that produce the best and most candidates)

Click here for the full list of strategies.

The Group came up with these **additional recommendations**:

- Hire recruiters who source candidates and recruiters who screen candidates
- Pay employees weekly instead of after six months for referrals

While no one strategy will solve all of the talent problems, focusing on a handful can have a meaningful impact. Some strategies like offering employee referral incentives and doing more social media recruiting can be implemented quickly. Other strategies like working with local colleges require more time and effort. However, a combination of short- and long-term strategies will probably produce the best results.

Additional Retention Strategies: While several recruitment strategies were identified above that are also useful retention strategies, the Group culled **seven more recommendations** from Quantum Workplace and Mercer's research.

1. Make smart hiring decisions to reduce turnover
2. Enhance onboarding process to increase employee job satisfaction
3. Communicate more and better with employees
4. Discuss opportunities for career growth and development
5. Improve annual performance review
6. Promote collaboration and teamwork
7. Prioritize diversity, equity and inclusion

Click here for the full list of strategies.

As you think about Retention, a Mercer conjoint study captures the key issues that are keeping employees up at night and how they differ between your low and high wage workforces. Understanding the unique needs of your population, can help you to prioritize your focus as you design your benefits program, support resources and HR policies to better align with what is truly valued by your employees.

What's keeping your workforce up at night?
A tale of two workforces

Results from a conjoint study on employees' top concerns
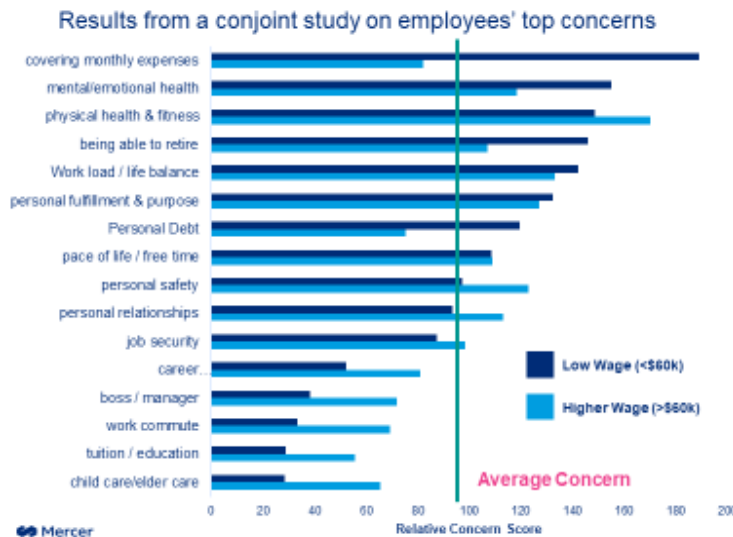
Physical Health, Work-Life Balance and Mental Health tops the list of concerns amongst all workers

Low wage workers are more worried about making ends meet, physical and mental health, and financial wellness (retirement and debt)

Higher wage workers are most worried about their health, work / life balance and personal fulfilment and purpose

WCA Initiatives Supporting Recruitment and Retention: Besides the annual Workforce Development Summit that brings together stakeholders from across the region to discuss best practices and models that can be replicated, WCA also publishes the Regional Talent Resource Guide that profiles local colleges, universities, BOCES, Workforce Boards and Career Centers with education, training and career services. The guide also includes a list of government and nonprofit programs, services and resources for employers and employees. The Guide is full of recruitment and retention opportunities.

WCA's Talent Council and Finance Roundtable have also been successful in bringing together colleges and employers to collaborate on creating career pathway programs and talent pipelines. Specially, the Talent Council is focused on addressing the nursing shortage and is looking at grants to provide the necessary resources for initiatives identified by members. The Finance Roundtable is creating videos and a guide profiling local employers to be shared with local college students. As well, the Roundtable hosted a World of Accounting event in September 2022 that brought together students interested in internships and jobs with faculty, deans and accounting firms who will discuss all the career opportunities in accounting and benefits of working for local firms.

Additionally, WCA received a grant from Westchester County for the Healthcare Talent Pipeline Program (HTPP). The program has been very successful in fostering a collaboration between nonprofits, colleges and career centers to recruit, train and support disadvantaged job seekers. The employers were invited to visit classes to meet students and instructors to increase awareness and interest in their organization and job opportunities. We also coordinated an Interview Day which brought together students who recently graduated with employers trying to fill positions as a program specific recruitment event. A number of positions were filled as a result and feedback from students and employers was very positive. These types of activities are also very useful in helping to establish or enhance talent pipelines.

Mercer Research: Mercer provides a variety of employer benefits and they focus on workforce development. They are a WCA member and key report partner.

The following chart from Mercer highlights the importance of understanding and meeting expectations of diverse populations.
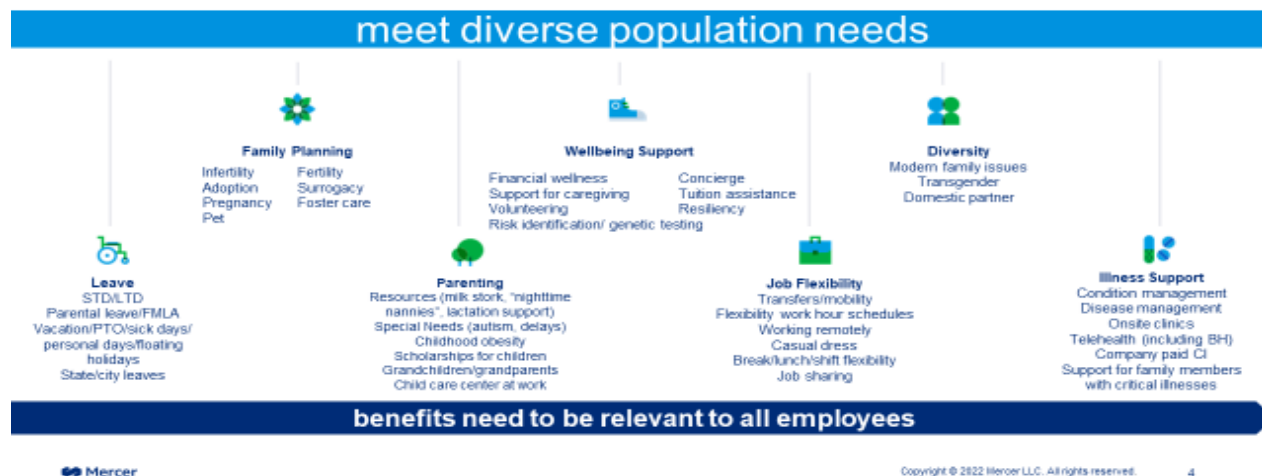
All of this together relates to the employee value proposition (EVP). From Indeed.com, "An employee value proposition is the set of benefits you offer employees in return for the skills, experience and qualities they bring to the position…Your EVP typically includes the benefits, financial rewards, career development opportunities and additional perks employees receive. It also mentions your company's values and vision. The goal of an EVP is to make employees excited and proud to work for your company, and is an excellent way to build your employer brand… Strong employee value propositions (EVPs) set you apart from your competition and can help you attract quality candidates and retain impressive employees. Creating an effective EVP involves learning what your current employees enjoy about your company and what candidates want in their ideal workplace."

Also from Indeed.com: "Many job seekers search for companies that share similar values. Seeing an employee value proposition that aligns with an employee's goals and passions may convince them to choose your company over another. In fact, according to an Indeed survey, 21% of job seekers decided to accept the offer for their current job because their interests and values were reflected in the company's mission. Not only that, but having a compelling EVP can attract passive candidates (i.e., those who are not actively looking for a job but are open to the right opportunity), which makes up a large percentage of the global workforce. Overall, EVPs are to employees what unique selling propositions (USPs) are to customers and clients."

Conclusion: The surveys, articles, WCA initiatives and Mercer research have identified dozens of recommendations for employers to improve their recruitment and retention results. We recommend using several strategies at the same time and including performance metrics to measure outcomes. A multipronged approach will make it more likely that goals will be reached and in less time. Measuring outcomes will help determine which strategies work best and should be extended or enhanced.

If you don't know where you are going, you might wind up someplace else. - **Yogi Berra**