

A REAL OPPORTUNITY BY KENNETH A. "BUZZ" SHAW

NEW RECRUITING RULES



Today, economic challenges occupy our daily lives and often leave us sleepless. We don't know about tomorrow, except that we had better be ready, especially when the economy turns to a growth mode.

Will your business or organization move, be ahead or stand still? The answer depends on the kind of people you have recruited and nurtured over the years.

A recent study conducted by the American Society for Training and Development reveals that more than 38 percent of companies surveyed are putting more — not less — in the development of their staff. They are preparing for an uncertain fu-



ture and they want to be sure, whatever might come, they are ahead of the learning curve. I am putting my money — well, what is left of it — on them.

Let's start with a brief story. As a high school kid in the late 1950s, I saw firsthand the "old school" approach to recruiting and nurturing leaders. Many of us had parents who worked in steel mills, refineries and auto factories. The unwritten covenant: "Come work for us — if you work hard and are willing to do shift work, you will get a decent salary, benefits and a job for life. An occasional lay off might occur, but we will bring you back."

This was not an ironclad guarantee, but it came very close. This worked out well for our parents but not so well for their children as thousands of well paying factory jobs disappeared. Sound familiar?

An employer trying that line today would be seen as either a liar or hopelessly nave. A different approach is required for "new school" recruitment and leadership development. Here is my suggestion: "Here is my commitment to you — if you are highly motivated and willing to work hard, you will be given many opportunities to learn and grow. Whether you stay with us a long time (which we hope) or eventually take a position elsewhere, you will prosper here. You will become even more valuable to us or to another employer. Do you have what it takes?"

Now comes that hard part. How do you develop these future leaders? Leadership consultant Jack Zenger offers some good advice.


1. Expand the person's scope of authority, allowing him or her to confront new challenges and learn from mistakes.
2. Allow for cross training experiences where complementary skills are learned. An example would be communications training for a top engineer who needs to more confidently and effectively communicate his or her views.

3. Provide carefully designed work experiences such as special projects, temporary assignments, participation in task forces and the like.


4. Develop forums on leadership where top employees have the opportunity to talk about leadership challenges and learn from one another.

5. And my favorite, emphasize active learning. This means actually "doing" the new things learned.

For example, when you plan to send a colleague to a conference, ask beforehand what he or she expects to bring back. When he or she returns, ask what take-home leadership points were brought home. And ask what he or she intends to do with this information. How does this fit with his or her personal growth plan? How will he or she share this newly found knowledge with colleagues (maybe at a leadership forum)? Ask how his or her personal improvement plan is progressing. If you are the forgetful type, prepare four envelopes. Send one out every three months. In each ask the same question about progress being made. New learning opportunities are great, but they only pay dividends if serious follow up occurs.

So, allow for growth opportunities, have high expectations making personal and professional growth a part of your operation's culture. Will you lose some very good employees because of your leadership development efforts? Probably. But the new recruits will be even better because yours is a place where employees can prosper. You will be making your luck. 

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Kenneth A. "Buzz" Shaw also makes his expertise available to the public through his Web site, <http://whitman.syr.edu/shaw/>, which includes videos, articles, podcasts,  speeches and presentations for leaders and business professionals.