PT WORK Force®

2020 PT WORK Force Blog Posts

Welcome to the PT WORK Force® Blog

Posted On March 23, 2020

PT WORK Force, an initiative of the PTDA Foundation, is proud to bring this blog to the power transmission/motion control (PT/MC) industry to provide insight and resources on recruitment and retention.

Employees are your greatest asset and may also be your biggest challenge. We will point you to the most recent developments, provide information on what other companies are doing and share resources that are available for your use in recruiting and retaining employees.

We want this to be your go-to place for talent-related information such as ways to find new talent, how to onboard and train, and strategies to keep your current employees.

We encourage you to provide constructive feedback so we can always provide what you need. We would also love to hear from you – share your success stories!

Want Your New Hire to Stay?

Posted On April 1, 2020

Retaining a new employee starts as early as the interview process. Nearly 28% of new hires quit within the first 90 days, according to Hireology. Check out this comparison of two qualified candidates and their journey with two different companies as published in *Transmissions*, Volume 1, 2020.

What Are We Learning from the COVID-19 Crisis?

Posted On April 15, 2020

With no road map on how to handle a crisis like COVID-19, we are all figuring it out and making it up as we go. It has forced us all to come up with new ideas and find new ways of doing things.

For example, I am working from home full-time (as many of you are) for the first time. I have always preferred to read articles in hard copy so I would print items and then also write notes directly on the paper. I don't have a printer at home, so I have started reading articles online and taking notes in a Word document. I have learned I don't need the printed copy and expect I will continue this practice once I'm back in the office. An added benefit is that I will save more trees and spend less on paper and ink!

I expect when we emerge from this crisis, the way we work will look different from the way it did before. Get ahead of the curve and spend time thinking about what you are doing differently. Reflect on these changes and determine if they should be permanent or temporary. If you supervise others, go through this exercise with them as well. You may uncover some ideas that will save money, improve efficiency or increase productivity. Use this list of questions developed by Lets Grow Leaders Together to start thinking about all the changes you have made.

How to Support Employees Through COVID-19 Crisis

Posted On April 14, 2020

We don't need to tell you that everyone is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. We also don't need to remind you that every person is different and, while there are some similarities in what we are all experiencing, there are also differences. To accommodate each of your colleagues individually, you are spending more time figuring out how to support each based on their personal situation right now. Here are a few suggestions on how to support your employees based on things we have heard from PTDA members, our own personal experiences and articles we have read.

COMMUNICATE! We are all at home, isolated and feeling like we don't know what's going on. Share as much as you can as often as you can via multiple channels (email, phone, text, video meeting, etc.). Let your team know you are present and when you are available to them as they can't see if you are at your desk.

We all see the unemployment numbers and are scared we might lose our jobs. Be proactive and transparent in telling employees about the financial health of the company as well as short- and long- term plans.

We all have questions but some of us are too scared to ask. If possible, have an anonymous way for employees to ask questions and then answer those questions in a timely manner.

FOCUS ON HEALTH! We are all thinking about physical health right now, but it's just as important to make sure your employees are maintaining positive mental health. An article from Forbes states, "Healthy employees will be the essential strategy for survival." Yes, it is your job to make sure that goals and work get accomplished, however, that won't happen if your employees get burned out.

One way to support your employee's health is to understand that everyone has different things going on at home affecting their concentration and productivity. Everyone is working under conditions unlike any other we have experienced. Parents are juggling work and kids, essential workers are worried about getting themselves and those they live with sick and some who live alone are feeling isolated. All of us are scared and overwhelmed with the uncertainty of the situation. Take the pressure off a bit by making it clear what is a priority and what can wait. Read more tips about "How to Create an Emotionally & Physically Safe Work Environment During a Crisis"

And, most of all BE HUMAN and COMPASSIONATE. There is nothing easy about the condition we find ourselves in, whether as a boss or an employee. There will be times during "work hours" when a mom or dad will need to tend to the kids, when a family pet needs some play time, when a mother, sister, friend calls and needs to be listened to, when we feel overwhelmed and need to take a walk. Both manager and employees need to realize things like this are important and need to be dealt with when they happen and not "when I'm done working". Adapting to human needs may slow down productivity in the short term but create employee loyalty in the long term.

We would love to hear how you are handling things during the crisis. If you have a story to tell about how you/your company is handling remote working, employee issues, having to close for a while, let us know. Post a comment or contact us at foundation@ptda.org to submit a blog post. We'll post them so we can share each other's experiences.

Take Your Mentoring Program Online

Posted On April 16, 2020

Mentoring programs are important. They foster an opportunity for professional development and knowledge-sharing and have been shown to increase job satisfaction and reduce turnover.

With the current COVID crisis, your mentoring program may have been halted. Or, maybe you have multiple locations and are looking for ways to foster engagement without worrying about physical location. Here are some ideas for an online mentoring program.

Remember the saying, out of sight, out of mind? That can easily apply to a mentor program if the mentor/mentee are not regularly seeing each other in the office. More frequent, shorter video meetings is a best practice for online mentor programs to keep the relationship top of mind for participants.

Encourage the use of chat, text and email between video conferences – especially if the mentor and mentee were used to stopping by each others desks regularly.

Whether your mentor program is always online or only temporarily online, make sure you don't lose site of the goal of the program and how you measure success.

Setting Your Team Up to Successfully Work Remotely

Posted On April 22, 2020

Working from home can be tricky. There are all kinds of new disturbances—spouses (who are also working from home and is also new to this experience), children (who are also home now and expected to do school work remotely), parents (who, if elderly, may need assistance), dogs, cats, lizards, other family pets.

As a manager, you are expected to help your team adjust and persevere through these times even if you have never worked remotely yourself. If you have been working remotely, then you have some idea of how it can be done successfully, but maybe not how you can help your team.

An article on the Workforce Institute at Kronos Incorporated website *offers three steps to make the transition easier.*

- First, set clear expectations for both your team and yourself. They need to know what support they can expect from you in these trying circumstances.

- Second, keep communications channels open—both to your employees and from your employees to you. Communicating virtually is trickier than face-to-face communication where you can see the person's face and hear their voice to get a better idea of what they are really feeling.

- Third, check in often with your employees and find out what they are feeling and the things happening in their life. "A good leader is caring, empathetic, and provides support for their employees during this time of need and change."

Leave a comment and share how you are helping your team or what your boss has done to help you.

Are You Micro-Managing Your Newly Remote Employees?

Posted On May 4, 2020

Suddenly, we no longer have the tools we used to have to manage our team. "Management by Zoom" is not the same as "management by walking around." You don't overhear two employees discussing a project in the breakroom or see a cross-departmental team meeting in the conference room. Yet, you are still expected to be on top of the status of projects and be able to report back to your boss about what's getting done.

So, you start ramping up the number of emails you send "reminding" people of activities to be done and deadlines that need to be met. You start scheduling twice-a-week check-ins instead of the biweekly check-ins you use to have. You asked to be copied on all internal and external emails. Not only are you creating unnecessary work for yourself—you are now micro-managing.

It is hard to define micro-managing. What may seem like staying informed to you can be perceived very differently by your virtual team. You want your team to know you are willing to help where you can. Your team, however, may view your inquiries as spying on them to see what they are doing. It all depends on what side of the situation you find yourself. But, if a member of your team feels that you are micro-managing them, then you probably are.

A recent article from Remote Leadership Institute offers suggestions to overcome that urge to micromanage while still being connected. For example, accommodate the different work styles for each member of your team by asking questions like "How often do you want to touch base?" or "What is the best way to communicate with you – phone, email, text, etc.?" If the response you receive is not what you can live with, negotiate something that will work for both of you.

Your team member's perception of you comes from your behavior and how the other person views your way of doing things. Resisting the urge to micromanage will go a long way in preserving employee morale and retention.

Hiring During a Pandemic

Posted On May 13, 2020

By John Masek, Bearing Service, Inc.

"We finally got a live one!," I told Loretta, our Branch Manager. It was early March, and we finally got a good lead on a senior level account manager from IndeedDirect. We'd been looking for months to find a qualified candidate – kissing a lot of frogs looking for a princess or prince. But now, we thought we finally found a great candidate.

The phone screening went very well, and then the face-to-face interview also went well. The assessments also matched the cognitive and behavioral traits that we were looking for in a person to become an effective, proactive salesperson. It was now March 13, and we had decided to have the majority of our workforce work from home. This posed several issues for us when it came to hiring this candidate. How would we onboard effectively? What if we brought them aboard as an employee, only to have to term their employment if we instituted furloughs or layoffs to our existing staff? What a dilemma!

Hiring someone new to the team during a business crisis posed new challenges for us as I'm sure is the case for other companies whose business is being impacted negatively. In 2008-2009, it was cut and dried – we weren't going to hire anyone new, period. We had to lay off 40% of our workforce, and it would have been insulting to those who remained if we had brought on somebody new while letting their co-workers go. This time is a little different as there is some optimism that business will rebound more quickly than it did in 2009. That, coupled with us having found a great candidate and not wanting to start our search over from scratch after the COVID-19 crisis, we decided to make an offer. However, it wasn't our normal offer as we added an open-ended start date. In addition, the offer included some nice perks effective as of the start date and again after 90 days of employment.

After contemplating a couple of days, our candidate accepted the offer, contingent on a clean background check and drug screen. Now came the challenge of continuing to

engage this candidate, who is kind of a new hire, but kind of not. Here's some of what seems to have worked so far:

- Weekly (or more often) outreach to the candidate by myself and the branch manager via email, phone and text
- Copying them on internal emails sent to all employees regarding our organization's response to the health crisis
- Sharing information about our company – marketing materials, articles and details regarding what they viewed on our website
- Getting all the background checking paperwork completed on both sides, to be ready to send to our service provider when it made sense

Finally, our Governor's "Stay Home, Stay Safe" order was starting to be relaxed, and it was announced that industrial concerns could begin to start up as of May 11. We decided to see if we could start our onboarding process slowly. I reached out to our candidate and had a nice discussion about us starting the process of making them a full-time employee. Our next steps are to:

- Initiate the background check with our service provider
- Have the candidate visit our drug screen lab
- Amend the offer to allow for compensation during the indefinite part-time period
- Set them up with a company-issued laptop and login information
- Begin online training with our key vendors
- Arrange for additional training delivered via Zoom meetings
- Set them up in our payroll system as a part-time employee

So, where we are today is that we have an engaged candidate who we are easing into our company. We are considering the continuing effects of the pandemic, while ensuring that we won't lose this candidate to another opportunity. While we still can't determine the full-time start date, we think that by modifying our hiring and onboarding process, we will end up with a great employee who appreciates that we did our best to bring them on board during an unprecedented time in the business cycle.

Transparency is Key During Furlough

Posted On May 14, 2020

This pandemic has forced many companies to make tough decisions regarding their employees, including having to furlough some. While that may be the best decision for the business overall, all employees will have strong feelings about this practice. Keep morale up during this difficult time by being transparent and communicating often with both those on furlough and those holding down the fort.

For the employees that you need to furlough, tell them before you make any announcements to others. Begin with an honest explanation on why they are the ones being furloughed and how the decision was made. Make sure you tell them that you value their contributions to the organization, and you look forward to having them back on board when the situation gets better. From a practical perspective, provide them with all the necessary information about unemployment benefits and how their insurance benefits will be affected during the furlough.

Once on furlough, check in regularly with the employee to ask how they are doing and share any company updates. These actions will reinforce the value you believe they add to your company.

As soon as you can, explain to all staff the reasoning behind a furlough and what business situations need to change to bring furloughed employees back. Hold a staff meeting and allow time for questions. Reassure the remaining employees that the furlough is intended to be temporary.

Being the person who made the cut while others did not can result in "survivor's guilt" and lead to disgruntled staff and low morale. They look at the employees who were furloughed as friends with whom they shared lunches, jokes and who knew their strengths and weaknesses. They may have questions such as: Why did they get furloughed and not us? Are we next? Will they really be brought back when things get better?

While furloughing employees is difficult, the more transparent you are about the how and why, the more likely you are to have support from your team.

Company Culture During a Pandemic – Why Does it Matter?

Posted On May 19, 2020

You are trying to keep your business afloat, stay in touch with your customers, take care of your family, etc. Who has time to think about company culture? While it may not feel like a priority right now, company culture is a big part of an employee's reason for working for you. Furloughs or layoffs may be top of mind now, but even if that is the reality for your company, you still want to retain your top employees and, when things get better, you want your company to have an excellent reputation to help you recruit new employees.

Prior to the pandemic, employers were having a hard time finding candidates to fill open positions. Now, there are many people who have lost their jobs and are looking for a new opportunity. However, it doesn't mean you will have an easy time filling positions. The good candidates—those with the technical knowledge AND the soft skills that are so important when working with customers—will still be in high demand.

These savvy candidates are going to want to know how you treated your employees during the crisis: Did you do your best to keep them on board? Did you offer support based on their specific circumstances? Did you allow for flexibility? Did you keep them informed about how the company was doing? Did your company do anything to support your community?

If your employees talk about how you took care of them during their time of need, you'll have no trouble finding REALLY GOOD candidates and prove that your business is a great place to work. Memories of how they were treated will stay in their minds forever, and they will make their thoughts known.

Keeping Company Morale Up

Posted On May 20, 2020

With so many of your employees working from home, it can be hard to keep morale high. Things just aren't the same as they were – we can't stop by someone's office or go out to lunch. When we are connecting via phone, Zoom, etc., it is often for a specific purpose and the conversation stays focused on that topic so we miss some of the daily personal chitchat that happens around the water cooler. Many employees are missing these types of interactions. With the added stress of the pandemic, it's difficult to keep morale high.

So how do you go about keeping employee spirits up when nothing is normal and everyone is in their own homes? Sorry, but there is no "magic bullet" that will assure all your employees will remain engaged and your employee morale high, but here are some things that will help:

- Is it really important? There are many things we do that we have always done – maybe it's time to look and see what can be eliminated now AND when we get back to the workplace. One thing that comes to mind is filing hard copies of something (an update to the policy manual, an invoice to be paid, a backorder). Since we are probably getting along without filing these now and only keeping them electronically, can we eliminate this step when we get back? Are there other tasks that really don't need to be done? Ask your employees and see what they say.
- Does everyone need to work specific hours? During the pandemic, many people are juggling different roles – employee, parent, teacher, caregiver, etc. – and being available to those who need them when they need them will trump being at the computer and working. Don't make someone feel guilty by obligating them to the same set of hours they had when they were in the office. A report can be written at 9:00 pm as easily as at 9:00 am – so don't sweat the small stuff.
- Do your employees need a break? Don't mandate a specific number of hours to be worked – let people go outside and enjoy the weather for a while, take

a yoga class or have a coffee break. These activities will help people relax and take care of themselves and, in the long run, be a happier employee.

- Ask people how they are doing and if they need any support. If someone tells you they need something, make sure you get back to them and do whatever you can to assist. Don't do this just once – ask often as circumstances can change.

- Find ways for people to socialize and have fun in the virtual world. At PTDA, we have an optional virtual happy hour every Friday afternoon. We don't make it mandatory as this may feel like an obligation to some. We also recently held a virtual picnic with lunch and trivia.

If your employees feel they are cared about, they, in turn, will take care of the company.

What Are the 3 Pitfalls Leaders Should Avoid During a Crisis?

Posted On May 27, 2020

As a leader, you want to do what is best for your employees and organization. In times of crisis, you feel even more pressure to keep people happy and things running smoothly. Then why, despite your best efforts, are the results sometimes not what you had hoped for?

In *3 Cognitive Pitfalls Leaders Should Avoid During a Crisis* published by the Association for Talent Development, Dr. David Rock suggests we may be trying too hard to do too much in a very different world. Our natural tendency is to jump into action, but that adrenaline rush comes with a cost. **Focus on yourself first** to avoid burnout that will quickly be noticed (and possibly mimicked) by your team.

- Our natural tendency is to jump into action, but that adrenaline rush comes with a cost. **Focus on yourself first** to avoid burnout that will quickly be noticed (and possibly mimicked) by your team.
- You know how you're always talking about how your people are the what makes your company great? That doesn't change in a crisis. Sure, you need to bring in sales and keep your bottom line solid but **focusing on supporting your people** will help you achieve those goals.
- You and your team can only do so much. Admit it, adapt for it and move on. This may not be the time to launch that huge project—not because it's expensive but because your team just doesn't have the energy or time to complete it. **Focus on what's essential.**

How are you focusing on yourself, your people and your essential work? Use the comment feature below to share your success at avoiding these cognitive pitfalls.

Are Your Employees Stressed? How about You? How to Help

Posted On June 12, 2020

The last few months have been filled with stressful events – a pandemic, an economic crisis and racial tensions. As a manager, you need to empathize with employees who are extra stressed right now and be sure to be kind to yourself as well.

Stress can manifest itself in many ways including:

1. Changes in sleep or eating patterns
2. Difficulty sleeping or concentrating
3. Worsening of chronic physical health problems
4. Worsening of mental health conditions

With all these scenarios going on in our lives, it can be difficult to focus on work. There is no quick cure to alleviate stress or anxiety, but you can try to help yourself and your employees so it doesn't lead to sustained lost productivity or burnout. Here are some ideas:

- Encourage people to talk about their feelings–what makes them anxious—and talk about how you feel. Just because you may be part of a management team does not make you less vulnerable to feeling stressed or anxious. If you open up, so will your employees.

- There are many apps out there to help people deal with stress and anxiety. I use Headspace (probably not as often as I should) but, when I do, it does help to calm my nerves. There are other apps as well. Most offer a free trial period so you can try one yourself and, if you think it meets your needs, offer to pay the subscription fee for those employees who would like to try it.

- You can also refer employees to free websites like Mental Health America www.mhanational.org/covid19 where all kinds of mental health resources are available.

- Check in with your employees one-on-one with a phone call and find out how they are coping. On your first call, ask how often they would like to talk. This should not be a one-time only check-in unless the employee prefers.

- It can be difficult for employees to open up to their manager or another person of power, so if you have an HR person or someone else on staff who is trustworthy and can manage these conversations confidentially, appoint them to do so.

- Be flexible with what hours employees need to work. Offer time to deal with family issues and don't charge this to sick time or vacation.

These are just some ways you can help both yourself and employees deal with the anxiety and stress in the world right now. What other things are you doing to help people cope? Put them in the comment section so we can share.

The Return-to-Workplace Balancing Act: PTDA's Story

Posted On June 16, 2020

By Ann Arnott, PTDA Executive Vice President/CEO and PTDA Foundation Executive Director

On March 14, one week prior to Illinois Governor Pritzker's stay-at-home executive order, I sent an email to the PTDA staff mandating work-from-home. It wasn't a hard decision. Of the eight full-time employees, seven were already telecommuting for part of the work week. With some quick action by our operations team, that one employee was quickly set up for remote work.

What has been a very difficult decision is going back to the office. As a team, we work most effectively together—bouncing ideas off each other, tapping into each other's expertise to ensure the best service possible for our members. IMs, emails, phone calls, video chats are all great tools, but they're not nearly as effective or efficient as our face-to-face communications were. And, at a time when creativity and nimble problem-solving is essential, we need that spontaneous collaboration we have when we're together.

I didn't keep track, but I'm sure I revised the projected return-to-workplace date a dozen times as the State of Illinois and City of Chicago pushed the date further and further into the future. Finally, the State of Illinois moved to Phase 3 on May 29 and the City of Chicago on June 3. But I still didn't pull the trigger on return-to-workplace. What held me back? My concern for our team.

Throughout these three months, I regularly kept in touch with each team member to see how they felt about coming back to our offices in downtown Chicago. Anxiety was high—not necessarily over actually being in the office but rather the process of getting to and from work. Nearly all of us take public transportation as the cost and time of private transportation is ridiculous. What had made our location so desirable when we hired staff was now the very thing that scared them about returning.

Unlike the quick decision to work-from-home, as Mayor Lori Lightfoot said, "Our reopening process will be like slowly turning a dimmer switch, and not flipping a light switch." It took a lot of frank conversations and a couple more rounds of return-to-workplace date revisions, but we finally settled on a transitional plan. Between June 15 and June 29, staff has been asked to go into the office at least once to try out their commute. Then, beginning June 30, we'll all be in the office on Tuesdays and Thursdays for at least a "core hours" window of 10am to 3pm. This will allow us to plan face-to-face meetings (albeit with masks and social distancing) as well as begin to recapture the collaboration we enjoyed pre-coronavirus. We'll see how it goes. Odds are there are still more revisions to come.

Our experience is probably quite different from that of PT/MC employers. We don't have a warehouse, we don't have a production line, we don't have customers whose problems are best solved hands-on (although we do miss seeing our members). But what we do have I'm sure you have too—employees you care about, whose safety and comfort are your top priority and whose job security is dependent on you being able to best deliver on your value proposition. With proactive outreach to the members of your team and by being open to ideas, we all come to our own best solutions—for our companies, our customers and our colleagues.

What's your return-to-workplace balancing act been? I'd love to hear your story. Please share in the comments.

Tap into Your Personal Story to Recruit New Hires

Posted On June 19, 2020

By Tejash Patel, AMI Bearings, Inc.

One of the major challenges in the power transmission industry is an aging workforce, which becomes more and more noticeable with each passing year. We see it in manufacturers, distributors, and end customers. I am one of the younger generation (under the age of 40) and am part of PTDA's Next Gen Community. However, I am not new to the industry as I just celebrated my 21-year anniversary. I was 18 years old and exactly one year out of high school when I started in the engineering department for my current employer. I was attending college classes in the evening to maintain a working job and pay for my education. I always knew I wanted to be an engineer and was especially interested in the mechanical side as I always liked building and creating machined parts for our new designs. However, I never thought the power transmission/motion control industry was going to be my future. Twenty-one years later, I am pleased to be in the same industry as I have built endless relationships with customers, fellow peers and colleagues, had the opportunity to travel across the world and look forward to the future.

When it comes to hiring and retaining employees, the PT/MC industry faces challenges. Using third party recruiters, LinkedIn or other alternative website or local ads is a tapped-out resource as most companies hire using one of these methods. We also see young talent overlook our industry because they either don't know it exists or they don't think it is a good fit for them.

To bring in new and young talent, we must think outside of the box and I felt like my experience positioned me to help my employer. Most companies target students right out of college. However, my experience shows that often overlooked high school graduates who may not want to go to college or may need to work to pay for college could be a terrific pool of candidates. So, last fall, I volunteered to be a guest speaker at a local high school district's annual open house. Students from multiple schools

within the school district attended and had a choice of which speaker they wanted to listen to. I had a full classroom both times I gave my presentation. I was able to share how I got started in both my career and industry which seemed to grab the attention of many high school students who needed some guidance and direction for their specific career paths. After the presentations were over, I received a lot of positive feedback from students and parents as it was a personal story that they could relate to and I refrained from "death by power point."

Shortly after the open house, my company's human resource department worked with the local school administration to set up student field trips to give them the opportunity to see our specific business and to get a better idea of how they can use their levels of study in specific job roles. AMI Bearings, Inc. then had the pleasure of starting a school internship program with the local high school district. We had four students working as interns in different departments for after-school credit, giving students industry experience and the opportunity to try out career paths. The feedback from our student interns was all positive based on the work environment and ability to "try out" the workplace to see if it was a good cultural fit. When I started my career here I had to learn from the ground up—to this day I still live by the concept of "never stop learning no matter how old you are." What kept me at my company and in this industry for 21 years is culture fit. I had a good young boss who I enjoyed working with, I gained knowledge from older, experienced individuals and I had a few people who opened my eyes to how fun our industry can really be if you have the right attitude and guidance from the beginning. Salary is one thing. Culture fit, enjoying what you do, being happy with career goals and making a difference are the most important things to be successful.

Our industry will only continue to thrive if we bring in young, new recruits. I encourage each of you to get out and talk to students, invite them into your facilities for a tour (maybe on Manufacturing Day!) or to start an internship program like my company did. The benefits are not just for your company and industry as I personally felt good that I could make a difference and introduce students to an industry they may never have heard of, guide someone into making a better career choice for themselves or at least make them feeling better on how they can apply what they are currently studying into a specific job role.

What Does the Workplace of the Future Look Like?

Posted On June 30, 2020

By Mary Jawgiel, PTDA Foundation Program Director

We all know COVID-19 has changed what our workspaces will look like probably forever, but what will stay and become normal and what will fall by the wayside as we enter our workspaces post COVID?

The PTDA office has certainly changed—chairs in the kitchen on top of the table with "do not use" signs on them. Blue tape on the rug and at the entry to offices marked as six feet from the last. Little hooks for putting your face masks by your door so you don't forget to put your mask on when you venture out of your office. And hand sanitizer and Clorox wipes in many places throughout the office to remind us to wipe down surfaces we touch. We even have some cute signs with reminders on them: DON'T TOUCH – SOCIAL DISTANCE – USE A WIPE AFTER TOUCHING.

Personally, I like the "old office" better – with puzzles we could work on when needing a break, the ability to walk into anyone's office and be close enough to talk without raising your voice, being able to touch a door handle or the printer without grabbing a wipe to remove my germs.

Unfortunately, I think the 'six foot rule' will continue to be the norm until at least the end of the year, and the hand sanitizer and Clorox wipes will probably be the new norm—to keep away *all* germs, not just COVID-19.

Our staff is starting back in the office on Tuesdays and Thursdays and can work remotely other days. When our office lease is up, will we renew or move to permanent remote work? Maybe we'll keep the office but shrink the square footage we need. After all, if we can't eat in the lunchroom, what's the point of having more than a fridge and microwave? On the flip side, we would need a bigger conference room as our current one can only hold four employees who are six feet apart, unless all future all staff meetings will be virtual. And, does each person need their own office or cubicle or do we rotate days in the office and remote days to eliminate space (unless office sharing isn't allowed based on germs)?

Personally, I am in favor going back to the old normal but I don't think that is in the cards. How about you? What changes are you seeing in the office, in the warehouse, on the manufacturing floor? And if it were up to you, what would stay and what would go? I would love to know what you think.

Employee Retention in a "Feel Me" World

Posted On July 10, 2020

By: Brian DeBorde, Bearing Distributors, Inc.

We hear a lot about employee hiring and retention these days, and certainly both have become a behemoth that seemingly eats endless time and productivity. I hear and feel those woes myself, and after much thought—and hearing all too often that employees of today need to be coddled and cuddled—I took the opportunity to listen to the actual voices of a few millennials. From this, I have come to a different conclusion to the ever-problematic issues of hiring and employee retention. In a two-part series, I will share

my thoughts reflected from my personal experiences and recent conclusion regarding these two topics.

Let me start with employee retention, because it is not worth a hiring effort if you cannot quell turn-over.

I believe it could be argued that the lower retention rates of today are not perpetuated by the same reasons that drove employee turnover of even just a decade ago. In my experience, it appears that the "new millennium" brought not just innovation but a change in *aspiration*, and we are just catching up to the "new aspirations" of a new generation of worker.

When I entered the work force the "typical' candidate for hire was seeking a career as opposed to a job. In simpler terms, because there is not much difference (for most) in the two, we were looking for a place to call home—a career within a company that would build a path to growth potential and promotion as opposed to a job that could *"land"* us there. We sought a place to work, gain knowledge, participate in a community, be a part of that home, feel appreciated and prosper, with little desire to move from one home to another. We would grow old there and retire.

In truth, the employee of today is no different, but with some rather important exceptions. The employee of today wants that same "insurance" (assurance) in their choice of career-job-home, but if they feel they are not getting what they want, they are all too happy and quick to pack-up and move on to the next job to see what they have to offer.

The employee of today needs to feel included. I call them "The Architect:"

I am here to learn, participate in deciding – "*designing*" – my future, expect to be appreciated and told I am valued and thus promoted (per se). Feed my wants and emotions and recognize my value.
The employee of yesterday needed to feel accomplished. I call us "The Builder:"

I am here to work and learn. I ask to be included in promotion opportunities based on my accomplishments. I will ask for a promotion, seek to earn appreciation and thus be seen as a value to earn me that promotion. Let me express my wants and prove my abilities, and then my accomplishments can be recognized.

Google defines an **architect** as one who designs the floor plan and façade of the house whilst a **builder** oversees the actual construction itself. The millennial expects to be the designer of the plan and for that plan to be followed to build success. The baby boomer expected to follow a pre-existing design and then be allowed to build their success. The employee of today wants to be directly included in the design of their future. The employee of yesterday was content to build their own way into the plan.

Another factor affecting retention may be that we, as employers, have lost an open line of communication between manager and employee. More importantly, the indoctrination of new hires into our business culture at time of entry is vital. We knew *what* the builder was seeking to build and communicated back to them how they were progressing and where we saw them headed and they melded into the company culture. With the millennial, we need to introduce our community/culture and the avenues for developing a career with our company and they want to personally determine if that is appealing. In communicating with them, let them know you want their input on how they see themselves fitting into or adding to that community/culture and then collectively build on that to achieve advancement. Instead, we train them on product and simply assume they will fall in line or adapt to expectations, processes and policies like the builders that came before them.

I think of Chick-Fil-A, where every employee is energetic, personable, and ends the customer's experience with "My Pleasure." Who would have thought that possible in our "tech-savvy," somewhat impersonal society?? I must think that is because every new hire at Chick-Fil-A is entered into a management-to-employee training program that includes indoctrination (and a study) into their practices and policies, ending with an "if this, then that" or "start here and you can finish here" pathway to promotions. All of that integrated with a timetable of measuring successes and reviews to keep the employee integrated into their future (indoctrinating them into being a team member). The outcome is ultimately driven by collaboration—between management and the employee—for mutual successes. And this business approach is what I am hearing echoed (as desired) in the voices of these "new-employees-of-today."

Finally, my basic ideas on retention:

- Upon hiring a candidate, make sure their training includes a personal touch. Don't just rely on web-based training to welcome your employee to the company and make them feel at home. Indoctrinate them into the company policies, procedures and methodology/mission.
- During the first 90 days, perhaps every 30 days, have a conversation with the new hire to gauge how they are doing with training and finding their place within the company.
- Perhaps use a mentor—a co-worker (non-manager)—,to be the liaison between that new hire and the manager and help the person become a part of the community.
- After the first 90 days, ensure that management is in periodic direct communication with the employee and make sure the yearly review is a conversation, rather than a report.
- Be a coach, mentor, teacher and counselor. This may sound like a lot, but any manager "worth their salt" is already all these things, if only

subconsciously—just be more conscious of it and plan a design around it. Be an architect that knows how to construct a builder.

These are practices I have utilized through my career and have had great success with managing long-term, growth-oriented employees. These practices do have to be implemented universally through all management, less there be a break in the chain (which I freely admit is an area I have missed at times).

We need to get back to focusing on building a business community inside and outside of our companies. The bottom line is that relationship building doesn't just happen externally, and it is the key to long term retention.

Furloughed but Not Forgotten

Posted On July 14, 2020

It's happening across the world–companies have had to furlough employees to keep their doors open. Whether the furlough is intermittent (a week or two at a time) or longer term, you do plan on bringing these valued people back as soon as you can. When they return to work, you'll need to them to get back up to speed as soon as possible. Not only will you need their skills, you'll also need their commitment and dedication. How you treat them during this time might be the difference between long-term retention or them leaving your company.

Consider the following ideas for keeping furloughed employees engaged:

- Offer furloughed employees the same access to online training programs as you offer to employees who are still working. This will show you are still invested in their future, and it keeps their skills current (or hopefully improved) so they come back to work and can be productive quickly. As furloughed employees won't be getting paid if they participate in training, stress that participation is optional.
- If you can, continue to cover the employer portion of premiums for health care. Health care is possibly the biggest concern for those who find themselves furloughed – especially in the middle of a pandemic. Include mental health benefits as well.
- Communicate with furloughed employees often and with compassion. Being human will go a long way for morale with both furloughed and current employees. Remember: Those who have been furloughed will still be in touch with those who weren't. You want them to say good things about how you are managing this process to current employees.

If you treat furloughed employees with empathy and keep them up-to-date on what is happening in the organization, you will have engaged, skilled employees who know your business and are ready to contribute when they return.

Have you had to furlough employees? What did you do/are doing to make this a less painful process? Share your experience in the comment section so we can all learn from each other.

Adapt Your Performance Evaluations for a Remote Workforce

Posted On July 21, 2020

Many consider them a "necessary evil"—the one-on-one with your direct reports to evaluate how well they are doing at reaching their goals and contributing to the company's success. However, during the midst of the pandemic when priorities have shifted, now is the best time to sit down with your team and ensure they are focused on the right goals (which may be a 180-degree reversal from what they were when the goals were set) and have the resources they need to be successful.

Making this conversation even more difficult is not being face-to-face. Remote work and the way we communicate now has put technology between us and our team. The *Harvard Business Review* published an article just last month on how to do performance reviews—remotely. While most of the advice in the article applies to doing evaluations in a pandemic, there were two strategies specific to improving how to succeed with evaluations in a remote work environment.

Gather different kinds of data: When you saw your employees face-to-face, you were able to get visual clues on their effectiveness. You saw them in each other's offices or in the warehouse, meeting with each other to collaborate on a solution to a customer's production line failure. Your salespeople were out visiting customers and bringing back feedback on what was working and what wasn't. This may all still be happening, but you don't necessarily "see" it happening. Think about what other input you might need to evaluate someone's effectiveness.

Set the right tone: Setting goals and determining a path to achieving the goals has to be a cooperative process. Face-to-face is the ideal way to work with someone on their performance. But, right now, that may not be an option. While not perfect, video does provide more of the nonverbal input you need. And remember, your employee is struggling with reading your nonverbal just as much as you're struggling to read theirs. Be intentional with your body language, be explicit with your comments and encourage back-and-forth communication.
How are you giving feedback and helping employees be successful during this pandemic? Share your thoughts below.

Are Your Hiring Results a Hall of Fame or Hall of Shame?

Posted On July 28, 2020

By Merle Heckman, Manager Organizational Leadership Development, Regal Power Transmission Solutions

Anyone who has been involved in making hiring decisions has had people who turned out to be excellent hires—and those who you'd rather forget.

I can think of people I have hired who have been STELLAR in their performance and work. They worked from the heart and enhanced the organization. Co-workers said, "Wow, what an addition to the team." They were the Hall of Famers.

I can also think of people I have hired who (how shall we say this…) were LESS THAN STELLAR. They started strong with an impressive trip through the hiring process. But once on board, they fizzled, attitudes went downhill, performance sputtered. Co-workers said (usually to me), "Who in the world hired this person?" I am not saying they were bad people. Rather, for the job, they were not the right choice. For lack of more tactful phrase, these hires are in my Hall of Shame.

Let us just remember: **"The quality of an *organization* is to a large degree determined by the quality of the *people* it employs."** Our companies will rise no higher than the level of employees we bring into our teams. Think about the best employees you have—someone interviewed them and made the decision to offer them an opportunity to be in the organization. Think of the most challenging employees you have—someone interviewed them and made the decision to offer them an opportunity to be in the organization. In hiring, we choose the employees we bring into the organization. If the employee is not the right one, *we must take responsibility* for making the decision.
There is no more important topic than employee selection. Consider these ideas:

- If it is true that organizations succeed or fail based on the quality of the employees, then those who have the responsibility to hire directly *influence* the organization's success by the people they bring into the system.
- No matter what size of the organization, hiring the best and brightest employees lays a strong foundation for *excellence*.
- Those who do NOT understand this spend a great deal of time trying to *fix* the bad selection decisions.
- *Good* selection decisions make a difference.
- *Bad* selection decisions make a difference.

A great example of hiring better is the role of the "Bar Raiser" at Amazon. Bar raisers are individuals within Amazon who are vested in the business and act as a "third party" to the hiring manager. They are the final step to challenge the hiring process and the individual being chosen. Bar raisers are those internal employees who help the organization not be content to just hire but to get the very best. Take a look at https://blog.aboutamazon.com/working-at-amazon/how-amazon-hires.

Let's just not hire to be hiring. Let's hire the best. If you have to wait a bit longer to get the best employee—the Hall of Famer—then wait. If we hire quickly to just fill a role, watch out—the Hall of Shamer might be around the corner for you.

Stress-Buster? Try an Attitude of Gratitude

Posted On July 30, 2020

By Mary Jawgiel, PTDA Foundation Program Director

Between working from home in a space not resembling an office, worrying if things will "close" before they again "open" up, dealing with the commute via public transportation to the office and how the world ever got to this point—there are days when it's just too much.

There are various ways to relieve stress—exercise, meditation, taking a break, taking a nap, going outside and taking care of your plants, taking the dog for a walk, or if you don't have a dog, go for a walk yourself—but don't forget the mask. I'm sure you have your own way to try and counter the effects of stress.

There are days when one of the ways mentioned above works for me, and there are days when nothing seems to work. I am always reading articles on how to relieve stress and trying the recommendations but couldn't find one that worked consistently—until I read about gratitude.

Now, I look around and think of all the things I am grateful for—the unselfishness of healthcare workers, the small acts of kindness you hear or read about every day, my family, my friends, my health, my co-workers, my job and so many other things I have. Just thinking about the good things and reflecting on these lowers my stress level.

I've shared my go-to method to relieve stress, now let's hear yours.   Share with us by commenting below.

A Pandemic Positive: Great Talent Now Available

Posted On August 5, 2020

By Tim Johnson, HR Director, CBT

In 30 years of being in human resources, this is the most interesting time I've encountered regarding talent. The dilemma companies are having is should we hire now (when good talent is in the market) and be set for when we go back to "normal" (whatever that is). Or should we stop hiring and be conservative during these tumultuous times when nothing is certain?

Like many companies, we have seen a downturn in sales; however, we remain optimistic for the future. We continue to look for great talent wherever we can find it. We look online and post on a few boards. We grow our own talent from within our ranks. Our best resource for new talent is from our own employees. Over 50% of our hires are direct referrals from current employees.

Today is unique as there is a great deal of talent available due to the coronavirus. Many companies have laid people off or downsized their workforce permanently. We have let all our current associates know we are looking for talent and our Account Managers have made it known in our markets as well.

If you want to find talent now, be active in your local human resources associations. Let everyone know you are hiring during these times. We are very fortunate to have been able to identify and hire several highly talented people who would not have been available during normal times.

Don't miss out on this opportunity to find highly qualified difference makers for your organization during this unique time. While we continue to grow our own, we can make an immediate impact on the bottom line by hiring these people.

At some point, the pandemic will be over, business will return to a more normal state and we will be ready to go out and grow our market presence. I hope you will all be able to do so as well.

Give Hope and Build Confidence When You Share Your Vision

Posted On August 11, 2020

By: James Lopez, Managing Partner, Bearing & Drive Solutions/BDS Corp

Often, management discusses operational goals and the plans to achieve them with employees. However, when a vision of the future is shared, employees feel more like part of the plan and embrace it.

I had been in the bearing and power transmission industry for 19 years, having worked as a manufacturer rep, with a large national distributor and with a large privately owned manufacturer. I built a successful sales career and a great family life. At that time in my life, I would have never considered a change—especially one that involved such a challenge and risk. What made me consider it? I met with our company founder, my current business partner, who shared his vision of what would later become a very successful bearing and PT distribution company. His vision on what could be and how I fit into the plan is what persuaded me to make a change and leave my secure job.

Today, 15 years later, I don't regret the move I made. Now, once again, we are facing great challenges. Our employees are concerned for the well-being of their families

including the ability to provide them with a secure source of income. Now more than ever, we must keep our vision of the future and share it with our employees. Whether it's sales growth, expanding capabilities, increasing company resources or insight of progressive change, the vision will help keep focus on a positive future, give hope for better times to come and build confidence that we will return to normalcy.

What is your vision and what is the role of your employees in achieving that vision? We all want to be part of something with a future. Now is the time to talk about it.

Recruiting and Onboarding Virtually
Posted On August 18, 2020

By: April Gorelik, HR Manager, Dichtomatik

As difficult as the circumstances are in our current environment, we must continue to move the organization forward to the best of our ability. Instead of remaining stagnant, hoping for things to change, it is critical that we pivot and cope with having to recruit and onboard new employees virtually. It is a learning curve, or really a learning cliff, that both the employer and candidate have to navigate.

As an organization that prides itself on innovative interviewing techniques, we really had to work hard to figure out how to turn an interview process that typically involved three groups of interviewers, a lunch and facility tour into one that flowed smoothly via video chats and phone calls. Using trial and error over the last few months, we were able to design a new program. Fortunately, the candidates we interviewed were patient and, for the most part, things went smoothly. Our process now runs like a well-oiled machine when it comes to virtual interviews. We are able to incorporate multiple managers and team members as well as give the candidates a clear vision of what their typical workday would look like.

The key to this success is planning and communication. My department–human resources–ensures interviews are scheduled with every single detail listed out: who they will be speaking to, what "portion" of the interview will it be (technical, social, etc.), how long the interview will last, and, of course, links to access the meeting. They also give candidates the opportunity to test out the link and their camera set up by scheduling a "test run" a day or so before the actual interview. Not only does this ease fears of technical errors, but it allows HR and the manager groups to ensure their side of things work as well.

The same strategy is applied during the onboarding process. New employees are given a clear understanding of what their first week will look like. There are constant touch points with their new manager via video chat and introduction calls that involve all the departments within the organization. We work tirelessly to ensure new employees feel

welcomed and truly a part of the team regardless of whether they are working from home or coming into the office.

This may not be an easy process—and it may take up more time than we would prefer—but it's worth it! Not only are we continuing to move Dichtomatik forward, we are giving our employees the tools they need to be successful in a quickly and ever-changing business environment.

Hiring in a "Feel Me" World

Posted On August 25, 2020

By: Brian DeBorde, Vice President, Bearing Distributors, Inc.

In Part 2 of a two-part post, Brian offers his views on employee recruitment. See his Part 1 post on employee retention (posted July 10, 2020).
Making the right hiring decision is pivotal to long-term retention. Selecting the "right fit" candidate makes retention easier. As I tell every candidate, the interview process is an opportunity for them to inquire about our passions and goals, to see if they are a mutual fit and then, ultimately (hopefully) enter a long-term marriage.

What hiring managers should be looking for is that candidate that fits the intrinsic culture (or personality) of your work environment: Work Hard/Play Hard, All Work/No Play, or somewhere in between. Each environment can work and be successful, but only if the new hire's expectation and work ethic are the same as the culture. For example, a top-mechanic would not necessarily make a great sales manager because what they are passionate about (machines and mechanics) is not what they would need to be successful as a sales manager (interactions with people). As a hiring manager, we must be cognizant of our company's work culture, what personalities make up each department, what drives them, what encourages them, most importantly, who they are as people because, as they say, "oil and vinegar don't mix."

The key is creating a genuinely promising hiring pool. Once you have the "talent pool" of candidates, the selection should be driven by overall fit. Who fits in with the swimmers already "swimming" in the pool? Remember, at the end of the day, you are building (or adding to) your team and "there is no 'I' in team."   Sorry for all the clichés, but they fit – no pun intended.

Finally, these are my thoughts on hiring and onboarding

- Hire a candidate whose personality will complement the intrinsic culture (personality) of your office/staff.
- Upon hiring a candidate, make sure that they're on the job training includes a personal touch. Don't just rely on web-based-training to welcome your

employee to the company and make them feel at home. Indoctrinate them into the company policies, procedures, methodology and mission.

- During the first 90 days (perhaps even every 30 days), have a conversation with the new hire to gauge how they are doing, not just in training but finding their place within the company (comfort-zone).

- Find a co-worker (non-manager) to be the liaison between that new hire and the manager(s). Choose an individual who can make the new hire feel like a part of the "community."

- After the first 90 days, ensure your management is in periodic direct communication with the employee. Schedule conversations about their experience and expectations: How do you feel about your progress? What do you see as next for you? Here is how we can get you there.

- Be a coach, mentor, teacher, and counselor. This may sound like a lot, but any manager worth their salt is already all these things, if only subconsciously. Be more conscious of it and plan a design around it. Be an architect that knows how to construct a builder. (See July 10 post for more information).

These are practices I have utilized through my career and have had great success with managing long term, growth-oriented employees. These practices do have to be implemented universally through all management to prevent a break in the "chain" (which I freely admit is an area I have missed at times).

We need to get back to focusing on building a business community inside and outside of our companies. The bottom line is: Relationship building doesn't just happen externally. Focus on it as a key to long-term retention.

Building Bridges to Employees Through Conversation

Posted On September 17, 2020

By Merle Heckman, Manager Organizational Leadership Development, Regal Power Transmissions Solutions

Steve was the best boss I have had. He owned the trucking company I worked with for several years. He was an astute businessman—he knew business. he was also a student of people and valued the people of his organization—and, most importantly, the people he worked with KNEW he did by his actions and his words. Steve made sure each person understood how essential they were to the organization, to their colleagues and to Steve personally.

Our organizations are made up of individuals who have made the decision to provide their expertise for the cause of advancing our particular goals. These individuals are uniquely gifted with personalities, talents and experiences allowing them to contribute

to the cause. Yet, unless we provide the "bridges" to bring connection to these individuals, they can feel isolated and long for connection.

Yes, the coronavirus and working at home have brought this to light. Employees working from home long for the camaraderie of co-workers. Even before many started working from home though, many employees felt secluded and overlooked. The supervisor/boss needs to take the **initiative**—whether the employee is at home or in the office—to make sure to reach and have conversations. The conversations need to be more than check/doublecheck on work assignments. Taking a few moments to show genuine interest by asking questions and listening makes a difference.

I learned this from Steve who modeled how effectively this could be done. Every day when he came to the office, he would take off his hat and coat, then proceed from cubicle to cubicle to start some small talk showing **genuine interest.** He would ask questions about hobbies, children, trips, activities, sick family members and more. His goal was not to be nosy. His goal was to learn what was important to the person. In the next few days, he would follow up and continue the conversation to see how the child's game went or how grandma is feeling. He asked, he listened and he cared—and people felt **connected** with him.

Steve ran a successful business with excellent financial profit while helping employees feel connected through the "bridge" of caring questions. As a manager, supervisor and leader, each of us needs to take initiative to connect and reach out to the people who work with us. Here are five ideas to help us:

1. Set a number of people to reach out to each week and talk with them verbally. Make a conscious and specific choice.
2. When you reach out, ask questions and check in. Go a bit deeper than "How are you?" I have been asking the question, "How's your head and how's your heart in all this?"
3. Talk in terms of **their** interests. What is the employee interested in: flowers, hunting, bird dogs, travel, grandchildren, etc.? Let them talk about themselves.
4. Talk about them to know and respect them, not just to get them to do things.
5. When you call talk about them personally, do not include work details in the conversation. Make some calls that are just focused on their wellbeing.

We say employees are our greatest asset. Yet sometimes we ignore them as a person and as a human and fail to take time to properly interact with each one.

Let's make a difference to our employees today!

Making the Most of Those Remote Meetings

Posted On September 23, 2020

Based on the number of memes and funny videos about virtual meetings (have you seen the Progressive Insurance commercials?), we all share the pain of participating in (or worse, facilitating) a remote meeting that isn't productive. Fortunately, that doesn't have to be a truth for ALL remote meetings. Take a look at a few of the suggestions we've collected about how to make virtual meetings more productive:

- Invite only those individuals who are necessary. Record the meeting for playback by attendees and/or for those who might have an interest in the topic.
- Shorten the meeting time. Not every meeting must last 30 or 60 minutes. Try holding a 15-minute meeting and discuss ONLY the essentials.
- Instead of a regular topic-oriented agenda, focus on the questions that need to be answered.
- Use video for remote meetings. It's harder for people to tune out if they know they (and their facial expressions) can be seen by others (uh, yeah, Mara from Progressive).
- Start and end your meeting on time. If someone is late, don't wait for them.
- Make sure your technology is working by logging in 5 to 10 minutes early to test.
- A meeting leader sets the tone for the meeting. Approach the meeting with enthusiasm and thank people for attending.
- Find out what your employees feel makes a meeting effective. Do they want to limit the time people can talk? Take a break if the meeting is scheduled for an hour? Once the meeting norms are established, insist everyone knows and abides by them.
- As the meeting facilitator, make sure everyone participates. If necessary, ask people directly what their thoughts are.
- End your meetings with clarification of what the takeaways are and who is responsible for each action item.
- Make sure you get feedback from attendees on how the meeting went. You can send an email or call each attendee after the meeting to find out.

Do you have any tips for making remote meetings more effective? Put them in the comment section below and share what you have learned.

Virtually Possible: Life Lessons from Zoom

Posted On September 28, 2020

By Missy Muente, Distributor Trainer, NORD DriveSystems

Prior to the pandemic, I traveled all over the U.S. conducting in-person product training with our customers. Now that I'm not traveling, my training sessions as well as daily communications with customers and colleagues all happen from my home office. While I miss traveling and seeing my customers face-to-face, I made a conscious decision to make the most of the situation and use it as a growth opportunity. Hosting virtual training sessions via three different mediums wasn't easy at first, but the experience has strengthened my soft skills and given me greater knowledge as a professional. Even though I'm the trainer, I always make a point to continue learning, developing and challenging myself every day.

One of many virtual learning moments I have experienced was during weekly product training with our customer service teams who are divided into seven groups. During the final session of the week, my laptop screen suddenly froze, but the audio from my phone was still functioning. There was no time for a make-up session, so I needed to think fast to find a solution. Since I had created the course content, I knew it well and quickly designated two helpers—one to change the presentation slides and a second to read aloud any questions that appeared in the chat. Adding yet another element to the situation, the head of the customer service department also happened to be attending this virtual session. With these variables putting the pressure on, I was pleasantly surprised with how well I recalled the material while simultaneously keeping my trainees engaged. We all learned something new that day, plus it strengthened my adaptability, problem solving and communication skills.

What learning moments or success stories do you have from using technology to connect with your team or customers? How can you use virtual mediums to challenge yourself and your team to magnify your various soft skills?

Adapting Policies and Procedure to the Remote Working Environment

Posted On October 12, 2020

By Sylvia Silveira, VP, HR & Operations, NTN Bearing Corp. of Canada Ltd.

COVID-19 has certainly impacted how we conduct our business. We have approximately 100 employees working remotely including those in finance, HR, IT, marketing, engineering, customer service and service technicians. We are introducing Flex Return to Work that will take effect in the fall. Even then, we expect those employees whose work can effectively and efficiently be performed remotely to continue to work remotely (including our sales team).

With so many working remotely, it was important that our remote work policies addressed work hours, communications, equipment. Upon return-to-work, we addressed work schedules, safety protocols and signage.

Remote Work Policy

- Each employee maintains their regular business hours.
- All employees utilize various virtual work platform (such as GoTo and Zoom) for all their meetings to ensure that we can capture the relationship and team essence that has been the key to our success.
- Employees have been provided with the required tools such as laptop computers, monitors, headsets and other equipment to ensure that they are able to maintain an office professional atmosphere to perform their work from home.
- Daily morning huddles happen with their department managers. This has proven to be very critical in our success because, through them, we have created an atmosphere of trust and keeping each employee engaged and listening to their daily needs and challenges.

Return-to-Work Considerations

- It is our plan to have 50% of each department return to work on a one-week rotation. This is to insure we limit our employees to specific cohort bubbles, an added safety measure.
- We will supply safety equipment, safety technology and significant signage throughout the building and each office space. We will continually exceed the minimum safety requirements for a private workplace and adapt as required based on the recommendation of public health and safety officials.
- To further insure the safety of our territory managers & engineering & technical service staff (who would normally be visiting other customer workplaces and travelling from region to region), they are only working from home and are not permitted to travel, unless the situation is severely warranted and with approval of our President and CEO.

What policies have you implemented regarding remote work or return-to-work?

Two Tools to Retain Employees and Still Stay in Business

Posted On October 15, 2020

By Sylvia Silveira, VP HR & Operations, NTN Bearing Corp. of Canada Ltd.

Like many companies, NTN Canada was impacted by the coronavirus (COVID-19) with lower demand for our products due to customer shutdowns. We chose to believe that this was a temporary and immediate effect of the pandemic. Still, the shutdowns did affect our revenues, so we had to take action to avoid job losses or long-term layoffs. After much consideration, we took a two-pronged approach allowed us to avoid a mass layoff but still reduce our costs:

- We implemented a company-wide salary reduction. From June through August, everyone (including C-suite staff) took an 18% reduction in pay

(which yielded a 10% salary reduction for the year). All merit increase and bonuses for the entire organization were also cancelled.

- Our manufacturing staff was placed on a three-week furlough. Even during the furlough, we continued to hold weekly update meetings and monthly townhall meetings virtually with our entire staff to make sure everyone was getting the same information.

The three-week layoff of our manufacturing staff has now been completed; all affected employees have been recalled to work.

We conveyed our sincerest appreciation to all employees for their understanding and support of these required measures. The safety of our employees, our customers and their families was always the top priority. We are being completely transparent, informing them of our financial situation and all the safety actions we are taking to ensure everyone kept their jobs.

What Does it Take to Work Remotely?

Posted On November 4, 2020

For years, job descriptions have listed the skills needed to be successful in a position. With so many jobs now open to remote working, have those skills changed? What makes a successful remote worker?

Borrowing from industries where a remote workforce is nothing new, the power transmission/motion control industry is quickly discovering that while some of the skill sets for a job don't change (e.g., knowledge of the product for an inside sales person), there are some that make a remote worker more successful.

- **Ability to work independently**. Can they pick up a project and run with it without someone telling them what needs to be done?
- **Time management skills**. While distractions exist when working in an office, they are multiplied when working from home. Children, pets, chores—these all seem to loom larger when they're right in front of you. How well can your employee can they get back on track if their routine is interrupted?
- **Communication skills.** Being able to communicate clearly and efficiently and be understood is essential if work is to continue to be accomplished. Even with videoconferencing, it's still possible to miss nonverbal cues.
- **Use of technology**. Remote work is only possible because of technology. Can your remote workers troubleshoot computer problems or find the resources to solve a software issue? And can they intuitively manage the tools available through software such as Teams and Zoom?
- **Self-motivation**. Without other employees or supervisors looking over their shoulder to ensure accountability, can your employees rely on their drive to go beyond just completing the tasks? Your company still needs your team to be innovative and forward-looking to remain competitive.

What skills do you believe are important for remote working? Post them in the comments section to share with others.

Growth is Coming: You're Going to Need People to Support It (Part 1)

Posted On November 6, 2020

In his presentation at the PTDA 2020 Virtual Industry Summit, Dr. Alan Beaulieu forecasted growth for the power transmission/motion control industry beginning in 2022 and beyond. This elicited the following question from a participant:

Can we support the growth that's coming with people?
The question elicited a lengthy response from Alan. The first part of Alan's answer focused on outreach and recruitment and is transcribed below. We'll cover part two on retention in our next post.

If you mean as far as labor goes, probably not, no. You're going to need to automate, you're going to need to work hard on your retention, you're going work even harder on your recruitment and then on your retention. There are lots of different ways to do that, there are key ways to that. They're not hard they're just things you have to do. Let me just take a couple minutes to answer that because I think that's a big question.

If you're having a hard time being seen as a place where people want to work, what are you doing about it? Have you looked at your place from the outside so that people driving by would say to their parents, "Hey, I work there." Or are they going to drive by and go, "Yeah, I work in that dump." I don't mean to be crude but, really, have you looked at your place?

Now do people want to work in your place in your locality? Do they say that's a good place to work or do they not know who you are?

This to me was a brilliant idea from a steel firm, a steel distributor in Chicagoland. He could not get help to save his life. So, what he started doing with his space, which is nice space, clean space and he had a nice lobby and clean meeting rooms that he set up. He started having church groups meet there. He started Boy Scouts and then school groups meeting there, so that the kids could see what a clean facility it was and tell their parents. So the parents coming to see the kid could see what a clean facility it was and be impressed. Now they weren't necessarily the target market, but they would tell other people.

And every time somebody came in he gave them SWAG. They left with SWAG and a good impression and good word of mouth about working there and to change people's opinions. It made it easier for him to hire because he would no longer be a mystery, dark, who-wants-to-be-in-distribution kind of business. He was the business that people knew, understood and appreciated and that makes all the difference.

How are you interacting with your local community? What impression are you giving to your future workforce? Share your comments in the space below.

Growth is Coming: You're Going to Need People to Support It (Part 2)

Posted On November 10, 2020

In his presentation at the PTDA 2020 Virtual Industry Summit, Dr. Alan Beaulieu forecasted growth for the power transmission/motion control industry beginning in 2022 and beyond. This elicited the following question from a participant:

Can we support the growth that's coming with people?
The question elicited a lengthy response from Alan. The first part of Alan's answer focused on outreach and recruitment and was included in a previous post. Below, Alan addressed retention.

What are you doing along those lines? Are you making that difference? Are you making an effort to reach millennials? Here is something that we are doing at ITR. I wonder if you are doing it too. It really helps retention because a millennial on the first day they work for you, the number (I believe if I remember correctly) is 75% of them on the first day are thinking about their next job.

What are you doing to change that? You have to engage them the first day. If they are reading and filling in papers the first day, they are already thinking about their next job.

They better be engaged because they want to feel like they are contributing. You have to send a gift home to their family, however they define family—whether it's a spouse and children or whether it is parents or a significant other. You send a gift home with a handwritten note. It must be handwritten by somebody in authority. Just a little gift that says, "We're so happy that your (relation and name) became part of our family today. We just want you to know that we consider you part of the family now too and we are here for all of you."

That really increases retention. Gets you a lot of gravitas. So whatever you are doing other than complaining about it becomes the question. And have you embraced a distributive workforce? Can you embrace a distributive workforce? That really opens the labor pool to you and it can save you money at the same time.

What are you doing to hang on to the talented folks you have working for you now? Share your comments in the space below.

Welcome to Hybrid Teams

Posted On November 13, 2020

As safety protocols around the pandemic were put into place, many power transmission/motion control companies faced a challenge—not everyone can work remotely. Some employees are needed in the office, the warehouse or the plant. This has created a rather unique structure for the industry—a hybrid team.

Managing any team is not an easy task, but with more employees working remotely, the hybrid team requires more effort to maintain your corporate culture and keep everyone moving in the same direction. The key is communication.

While technology makes it easier than ever to communicate with multiple people in different locations, there are questions that arise and coordination that is needed beyond choosing the right platform for each type of communication.

What works well for one group (e.g., weekly face-to-face meetings for on-site workers) might not work for the other. Giving consideration to the needs of both sets of employees and making sure you are equitable and fair in addressing those needs can be overwhelming. It may be difficult for each group to empathize with the other and be understanding when new policies are put in place. As you make decisions around your hybrid team, get input from both the on-site and remote workers. For example:

- How often do you need to meet? Will you always be on-site meeting or virtually—or a combination? Is there a time most convenient for all?
- What are the expectations regarding availability? Are remote workers expected to work the same hours as on-site workers and on the same schedule? Are people expected to be accessible after hours—regardless of whether they come in or work from home?
- If key employees who used to work in the office are now forced to work from home because of family or other obligations, how will their on-site responsibilities be addressed?

Once you've made the best decisions possible, let everyone know about the decisions and the reasons behind them. As you talk to your employees, be open to changing or revising your policies even after you put them in place—especially if it's obvious the team dynamics are suffering or as you get new information that justifies revisiting your decision. Managing a hybrid team may not be easy, but if you communicate and understand the needs of both groups, you will find the road less bumpy.

Salespeople and the Pandemic

Posted On December 4, 2020

By Sylvia Silveira, VP HR & Operations, NTN Bearing Corp. of Canada, Ltd.

Our outside salespeople are mostly working remotely but not yet visiting customers in person. All our territory managers are working from home. We have quickly figured out

how to serve our customers and clients remotely and accelerated our own digital transformation.

We use online video meetings and interviews, reducing travel to clients and dispensing with physical conferences that can be done virtually. Additionally, we have implemented remote-service solutions for troubleshooting bearing equipment and managing client accounts.

Where virtual meetings are not possible, and with our triage mindset, NTN will deploy field service engineers and technicians to support our client base via our site visit approval process. This procedure is in place to ensure the safety of our employees is adequately controlled for their planned visit.

Our inside sales customer support team is also working remotely. We have set clear, deliberate expectations in advance and established ground rules for how interactions will take place—our employees appreciate this framework. Through a willful application of structure, consistent communication, opportunities for connection and trust, we have found that remote working has been an effective process for our inside sales department.

As public health restrictions are now escalating again, our policies will remain in place until April 1, 2021.

How is your company handling inside and outside sales? Let us know by using the comment section.

Determining Remote Work Pay Scale

Posted On December 8, 2020

Bill Moore, VP Business Development, ERIKS North America

Remote working was forced upon many organizations due to the pandemic. With several companies considering keeping a remote workforce for some or all their employees, these companies now can draw from around the country (even around the world) to fill positions. Employees may also be relocating to areas where the cost of living is much lower since they no longer need to be close to the office to perform their job.

This brings up the question of pay equity. For years, distributors and manufacturers have determined pay for their employees based on the comparisons to their geographic market. An inside sales representative in Wichita, Kansas might be paid less than an inside sales representative in mid-town Atlanta because the going rate for that skill set in each area of the country is different. Now, with geographic barriers dropping, is it

still necessary to have different pay scales? Or, do your comparisons now need to be national vs. local?

I'm seeing companies on either side of this dilemma. While most companies have not addressed the issue yet, there is a lot of discussion around how to move forward.

- Some are thinking of paying remote employees the same salary as they would be paid if they were in the office, regardless of their location. For those who live in areas with a lower cost of the living, they are seeing their salary go much further.
- Some employers are thinking of aligning pay based on the area where the employee is located. They see this as a fairer option and a way to save the company money in these trying times.

As with nearly any decision, not everyone will be satisfied with the company's strategy for paying remote workers. How is your company handling compensation for employees who move to less expensive areas? What issues have you encountered?

The Only Real Employee Retention Strategy

Posted On December 15, 2020

By Eric Chester, an award-winning keynote speaker and author
There is no Santa Claus. No Spiderman. And no such thing as the Tooth Fairy.

And there is no such thing as an effective strategy for retaining an employee who wants to leave you for a similar job with a similar company in the same geographical area.

Look, if one of your people has a valid reason for quitting their job (e.g., a geographic move, retirement, an illness, a pressing family matter, a significant career change, etc.) there's not a lot that you—or any other employer—can do to keep them.

Every time you find yourself in danger of losing a valued employee to another employer that wants them in a similar role, you stand at the precipice of a negotiation. This is the point where, to get them to change their mind, you must now offer that employee a promotion, a higher salary, more vacation/paid time off, permission to work from home, or a combination of any number of perks and working conditions. But this is just a temporary remedy that will last until the next time they force you back to the negotiation table.

To find and keep great people in your business, you have to be better than the competition (i.e., any company that wants the same people you do) on two fronts:

1. You must be a better place to work than they are

2. You must be a more creative and more relentless recruiter than they are

If you're not 100 percent willing and committed to do both 1 & 2 above, this challenging labor market is not going to improve for you anytime soon.

If you hire the right people—not the *best* people, but the *right* people—and you treat them better than another employer promises to treat them for performing in a similar role, you won't need a retention strategy because your people aren't going to leave. Why would they?

If you want to learn more about Eric's strategies for employee retention, check out the recording of the recent <u>PT WORK Force webinar, Winning the Labor War: Finding and Keeping Good People in These Uncertain Times</u>