



# DETERMINING POTENTIAL CAREER PATHS FOR NEW HIRES

REFINING THE ON-BOARDING PROCESS

# FORWARD

---

This study provides independent operators with ideas and suggestions on how to improve their efforts to recruit, develop and retain top-notch associates. Independent retailers, plus regional and national chains, have provided valuable information which is used throughout the document. The subjects selected in the study give an overview of the objectives and processes used to create industry best practices.

We appreciate the National Grocers Association Research and Education Foundation for its generous support of this project.

## **PAUL ADAMS**

Paul Adams & Associates  
Olathe, Kansas

## **LARRY LINCOLN**

Larry Lincoln and Associates  
Acworth, Georgia

## Other Participants

Additional interviews were conducted with several national and regional chains which asked to remain anonymous.

Information was provided by other companies who also wished to be unnamed.

# INTRODUCTION

---

In the not so distant past, finding food retailing industry management candidates meant writing a job description; posting the position on the company bulletin board, running newspaper and/or trade publication ads, or contacting a **HEADHUNTER**; and then waiting for the right candidate to apply. Well, that was your parent's and grandparent's generation. Today, it's different.

We now live in an age where jobs are more demanding and candidates from the X, Y or Millennial Generations want more from a job than a paycheck and benefits. Our culture, personal goals, technology and even social media have changed the hiring landscape.

## Participating Independent Retailers

### **HARMON CITY, INC.**

Salt Lake City, Utah  
Laurie Harmon, Vice President, Human Resources

### **HARP'S FOOD STORES, INC.**

Springdale, Arkansas  
Frank Ray, Vice President, Human Resources

### **MOLLIE STONE'S MARKETS, INC.**

Mill Valley, California  
Giselle Confehr, Director, Human Resources

### **NIEMANN FOODS, INC.**

Quincy, Illinois  
Jodie Felter, Director, Human Resources

### **NUGGET MARKETS, INC.**

Woodland, California  
Mary Muller, Director of Human Resources

### **REASOR'S LLC**

Tulsa, Oklahoma  
Dave Brumley, Executive Vice President

The independent food retailer is faced with a number of complexities that make hiring and retaining top notch management personnel a real challenge.

This study was designed to help the independent food retailer attract new external management talent, as well as provide growth opportunities for retaining internal high potential candidates.

A number of **BEST IN CLASS** independent food retailers and food industry regional and national chain operators were interviewed in late 2013. This 2014 study represents our findings of what is considered **BEST PRACTICES** among the food industry.

# OVERVIEW

---

This study presents the interview findings of the recruiting, hiring and training techniques of management associates by a number of **BEST IN CLASS** food retailers.

## 1 Strategy Development .....page 4

We discuss the need to have well defined recruitment and training plans developed and in place operationally. Upfront organization is the key to success.

## 2 Recruitment Planning/Interview Process .....page 6

We discuss the challenges of recruiting a member of the Millennial Generation. We present techniques used by many retailers to attract and retain this younger generation.

## 3 Overview Orientation ..... page 11

We share the findings of orientation practices of some of the **BEST IN CLASS** food retailers. Getting the new employee acclimated properly is the first step in developing a loyal and productive member of your team.

## 4 Training & Development ..... page 16

We discuss the structure of a host of training programs in place and operational by a number of top retailers. Training forms the foundation for management in meeting the company's goals and objectives.

## 5 Benchmarks & Measurements ..... page 20

We explain the best methodology to measure progress and success.

## 6 Obstacles to a Successful Program ..... page 21

We share the findings of **BEST PRACTICE** companies with respect to issues and problems encountered in implementing their plan. We will also provide possible solutions which sometimes present successful results.

## 7 Summary ..... page 22

We highlight the key points presented in each section. Building a talented management team takes a strategy followed by a plan and commitment to execution.

# STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

---

The interviews conducted for this study all contained one key and common element prevalent with all **BEST PRACTICES** companies; **A DYNAMIC AND EXCELLENTLY DETAILED PLAN FOR MANAGEMENT RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING.**

The plans were developed and are **CONSISTENT THROUGHOUT** the companies. The successful programs started with one set of simple, well-defined and easy to understand objectives with a supporting infrastructure. Even though many companies delegated the orientation and training to regional or local management, the development of objectives and infrastructures were consistent in follow through by all management levels within the company.

Each of the **BEST PRACTICES** companies has a plan which is consistently executed throughout their individual companies. All levels of management are familiar with their management recruitment and training plans, as well as committed to the execution according to the plan objectives, guidelines and detailed steps of execution.

Our company interviews revealed the strategies for well-developed management recruitment and training plans included the following:

- A plan developed by input from a variety of department managers, store managers, company executives coordinated by a Training Department and/or Human Resources Department.
- Every aspect of the plan is carefully detailed from recruitment through hiring, training, follow-up and managing the individual employee's career path.
- Independently-owned companies tend to promote from within to fill management positions.
- Companies have processes in place which enable the company to identify high potential candidates.
- Companies take the approach of building the bench both for current and long-term management requirements so they have the right people in place to get the job done.
- Companies have a well-developed and proud history of their company and are open to sharing and promoting this heritage with management candidates.
- The best developed plans include a well-defined **CULTURE** for their company, which they work to instill and perpetuate in their management candidates.

The key element of Workforce Planning should be a major component in any company's strategic plan. Workforce Planning is a process for identifying and addressing deficiencies between the needs of the current workforce and needs for the future.

Effective workforce planning enables managers and/or decision makers to:

- Develop a comprehensive snapshot of where gaps exist between current and future workforce needs.
- Help identify and implement gap reduction strategies.
- Help target hiring and/or training to grow existing capabilities or develop a new one.

Our interviews and analysis of the findings among the **BEST PRACTICES** companies found the following steps were used in Workforce Planning:

## Analyze Workforce

- Determine organizational direction and take into account strengths and weaknesses.
- Take into account any factors that might impact future management demands
- Build bench strength in order to grow, particularly with an aging workforce.
- Without planning, a company is limiting its growth potential.

## Identify Future Needs

- Identify any changes both internally or externally that might affect future management needs while taking into account future growth plans.

## Gap Analysis

- Use workforce analysis and future needs analysis to identify demand and supply needs for management in the future.
- Retailers may have to take into account recruitment from outside the company to fill management needs.

## Develop Strategies

- Develop and plan specific hiring and training program(s) to develop a management workforce to meet company objectives, growth and/or succession planning needs.

## Execute Strategies

- Execute the specific plan to maintain a management workforce to meet company objectives and involve the entire management team in the execution.

## Monitor and Evaluate

- Monitor and evaluate to determine the success of plan implementation and to make corrections to any deficiencies going forward.
- Planning a workforce is key to success.

## Workforce Planning Framework



## SHORT TERM AND LONG TERM MANAGEMENT NEEDS

This section helps a retailer determine what kinds of management requirements are immediate and those required over a longer period of time.

A few basic questions to get started:

### SHORT TERM:

- What are my management needs this year?
- How much of the budget is available for new hires?
- How soon do I need the new management candidate trained and fully assigned to new position?
- Do I have qualified trainers available to meet the needs of my training needs this year?

### LONG TERM:

- What are my expansion plans (number of new stores, departments, etc.) for the next 5 to 10 years?
- What are my management requirements to staff the new stores or departments?
- What is my turnover rate and how will that effect management needs long term?
- How will I budget and fund expenses in management staffing?
- How will I ensure I have adequate trainers on staff to meet training needs?

# RECRUITMENT PLANNING / INTERVIEW PROCESS

---

Our interview findings for recruitment practices found the key and common element prevalent within all **BEST PRACTICES** companies to be a **THOROUGHLY CONCEIVED AND DETAILED PLAN FOR RECRUITMENT**.

Recruiting is as much about **SELLING YOUR BRAND** as finding qualified candidates to hire. Making sure the prospect knows about your company's history, culture, policies, values, benefits, expectations and opportunities for personal growth are important in helping the recruit decide if your organization is a good fit.

To recruit and onboard a new management associate, the average cost per company can range from \$4,000 to \$40,000<sup>1</sup> With this type of upfront cost. It is imperative that companies have a plan and implement efficient hiring practices in order to get the best return on the investment.

Recruiting top notch candidates demands a proactive approach. Successful companies have clearly defined values when recruiting or promoting. The values of an individual determine whether or not they are hired or promoted. In order to attract these candidates a company needs to develop a dynamic recruitment/interview plan and process. Important values found in **BEST PRACTICES** companies include: teamwork, desire to learn, willingness to serve others, ethical standards and holding themselves and others accountable. Our company interviews revealed the most successful recruitment plans included the following:

## Recruitment Strategy

The successful companies start by making lists of both short-term and long-term management needs. Gathered from existing management and company associates, this information is the basis for developing a recruitment campaign with a well-defined plan for meeting a company's management requirements now and into the future.

## Promotions From Within

The vast majority of companies interviewed promote management candidates from within. This is sometimes called **THINKING INSIDE THE BOX**. Before looking outside your company, take a look at the people you have employed and see if anyone fits the position. Take a look at potential internal candidates who could grow into the position if given the opportunity. They are often called high-potential candidates.

Promoting from within excites and motivates all your employees and makes them **FEEL BETTER** about their own employment opportunities and about the company.

## Specialized Positions - Recruit from Outside

Specialized positions (e.g. pharmacist, bakery, food service, floral, etc.) are often recruited from outside. These positions usually require a higher level of special training and skills that your current employee base may not have. The best technique is to establish contacts and relationships with pharmacy schools, culinary institutes, bakery schools, etc.

To fill specialized positions your company should be engaged in **THEIR WORLD**. Your company should follow their industry through publications and attend industry events and conferences/conventions. The key to success is to make contacts and **NETWORK** within the specialized industry.

## Associate Referrals

The **BEST PRACTICES** companies rely on their current associates as a great source of knowledge for recruitment. A company should structure a referral program that allows suitable screening before hiring and only offer the referring employee a form of a bonus once the referral is hired.

<sup>1</sup> Human Capitol Institute / January 2013



# SAMPLE ASSOCIATE REFERRAL PROGRAM

Various companies, especially smaller ones, are always seeking new talent. This section provides some guidelines for rewarding those associates who can help recruit talent from the outside.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of an Associate Referral Program is to provide an incentive reward to current full-time associates who can refer new candidates who are eventually hired and are employed in a full-time position.

## ELIGIBILITY AND PARTICIPATION

Candidates are persons not currently employed with the company.

Referring Associates are all full-time employees with the following exceptions:

- All Human Resources associates
- All associates where regular job recruitment of employees
- Supervisors associated with the selection of the candidates
- Family members currently employed by the company

## REFERRAL BONUS AMOUNT(S)

The Referral Program operates under the authority of the Senior Management Staff and the Human Resources Department which established the following guidelines for bonus payments. An associate may receive multiple bonuses but the total paid is not to exceed \$2,500 in a fiscal year.

The amount of Referral Bonus for a given position to be filled will be the determination of Senior Management and Human Resources.

Referral bonuses payments will be paid in lump sum but not until the new associate completes their probationary period.

## REFERRAL PROGRAM GUIDELINES

- Referred candidates cannot be a current associate of the company to include temporary or contract associate.
- The associate selected for position must complete a probationary period before the referring associate can receive the referral bonus.
- The company will provide a form for completion and submission by the referring associate with the candidate's application indicating that the referring associate may be eligible to receive a referral bonus.
- Funding for the Referral Program comes under company budget guidelines.
- The referral bonus' are approved at the discretion of Senior Management and Human Resources.

## Establish a Database

The **BEST PRACTICES** companies keep a database of current and past candidates for the respective positions. Keeping their resume and other pertinent data on file (paper file or electronic) can be useful to reference for possible candidates in the future.

## Disperse Recruiting Responsibilities

Divide recruiting responsibilities between managers. Have one concentrate on referrals from **WITHIN**, another on **OUTSIDE** candidates. This creates efficiency and focus allows greater management involvement in decision-making and adds to the growth and the development of the entire management staff.

## Job Descriptions

First impressions are important; you may never get another chance. A job description is more than a list of required skills. An excellent job description should convey to the candidate the values of the job to the customer, company and candidate. An excellent job description defines roles and responsibilities.

The **BEST PRACTICES** companies use a collaborative approach with input from management and associates within the company. Some elements of an outstanding job description include:

- Brief description of the company and its mission.
- What the day to day work environment is like.
- Details of the exact challenges of the job.
- Key aspects of company culture and company values.
- A short list of job requirements – be specific.
- Outline of salary and benefits information.

The job description should focus on job functions and personality. Associates who enjoy a company's culture are more productive. Defining and communicating the culture in the interview process is very important. As a guide, take a look at a company's current top performers and model your job description after their traits and try to duplicate your own successes. Understand what makes someone successful in your company.

# RECRUITMENT PLANNING / INTERVIEW PROCESS

# SAMPLE JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Provided is a sample job description of a store director/manager. Naturally, each company will craft its own description based upon its own needs. The one provided can provide some guidelines regarding some key elements of a well-written description.

## SUMMARY

A Store Director is responsible for establishing and maintaining Genuine Customer Care, oversees and is accountable for the operation of a store ensuring maximum sales and profitability through merchandise, inventory, expense control, human resources management and managing operating costs and shrinkage.

## KEY ATTRIBUTES

- People/Communication skills
- Customer Minded
- Passion for selling/merchandising
- Integrity
- Product knowledge
- Leadership skills
- Stable
- Open Minded
- Organization/Prioritizing skills
- Detail Minded

## ESSENTIAL DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

include the following. Other duties may be assigned.

- To treat customers as guests with respect and courtesy while providing them with quick, friendly service. This includes greeting and acknowledging every customer, maintaining outstanding standards, solid product knowledge and all other components of Maximum Customer Care.
- Analyzes and measures business trends; develop and implement plans to maximize sales and meet or exceed goals and objectives.
- Controls shrink expenses and payroll.
- Ensures appropriate merchandise stock levels, merchandise adjacencies and presentations; signing and assortment in all departments; ensure selling floor is adequately stocked.
- Aware of competition activities and report results; share information with supervisor and make appropriate price recommendations.
- Reviews department/store trends and recommend and initiate changes for maximizing goals and objectives.
- Ensures compliance with all laws, policies and procedures through regular store management and staff meetings, store walk through and audits, etc. Act as corporate's representative both within the store and within the community.

Continually evaluates and reacts to performance issues.

- Actively recruits management candidates.
- Trains and develops store management in all aspects of the business; direct and monitor training and development for all store personnel.
- Any other responsibilities as assigned by supervisor.
- Ability to process information and merchandise through computer system and POS register system.
- Ability to communicate with associates and guests.
- Ability to read, count and write to accurately complete all documentation.
- Ability to freely access all areas of the store including selling floor, stock area and register area.
- Ability to operate and use all equipment necessary to run the store.
- Ability to work varied hours/days to oversee store operations.

## SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITIES

Manages subordinate supervisors who supervise associates in all departments. Is responsible for the overall direction, coordination, and evaluation of this unit. Also directly supervises non-supervisory Associates. Carries out supervisory responsibilities in accordance with the organization's policies and applicable laws. Responsibilities include interviewing, hiring, and training associates; planning, assigning, and directing work; appraising performance; rewarding and disciplining associates; addressing complaints and resolving problems.

## QUALIFICATIONS

To perform this job successfully, an individual must be able to perform each essential duty satisfactorily. The requirements listed below are representative of the knowledge, skill, and/or ability required. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

## EDUCATION AND/OR EXPERIENCE

High school diploma or general education degree (GED); or one to three months related experience and/or training; or equivalent combination of education and experience.

## LANGUAGE SKILLS

Ability to read and interpret documents such as safety rules, operating and maintenance instructions, and procedure manuals. Ability to write routine reports and correspondence. Ability to speak effectively before groups of customers or Associates of organization.

## MATHEMATICAL SKILLS

Ability to calculate figures and amounts such as discounts, interest, commissions, proportions, percentages, area, circumference, and volume. Ability to apply concepts of basic algebra and geometry.

## REASONING ABILITY

Ability to solve practical problems and deal with a variety of concrete variables in situations where only limited standardization exists. Ability to interpret a variety of furnished in written, oral, diagram, or schedule form.

## PHYSICAL DEMANDS

The physical demands described here are representative of those that must be met by an associate to successfully perform the essential functions of this job. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

While performing the duties of this job, the associate is regularly required to talk or hear. The associate frequently is required to walk; sit; use hands to finger, handle, or feel; reach with hands and arms; and climb or balance. The associate is occasionally required to stand; stoop, kneel, crouch, or crawl; and taste or smell. The associate must frequently lift and/or move up to 50 pounds. Specific vision abilities required by this job include close vision, distance vision, color vision, peripheral vision, depth perception, and ability to adjust focus.

## WORK ENVIRONMENT

The work environment characteristics described here are representative of those an associate encounters while performing the essential functions of this job. Reasonable accommodations may be made to enable individuals with disabilities to perform the essential functions.

The noise level in the work environment is usually moderate.



## Interview Process

The **BEST PRACTICES** companies rely on a collaborative approach to interviewing candidates. The interview process should consist of several interviews with different members of the company's management staff coupled with Human Resources interviews.

Outstanding interviews should include:

- Why would someone want to work for your company.
- A few relevant facts about your company's successes, and/or market position.
- Key aspects of your culture and company values.
- The best interview processes emphasize objectivity and tries to keep the guesswork out of the process.

The best interviews have a set of questions prepared in advance. These questions are used by all interviewers. The questions should center on work related issues and how the candidate would respond to problem solving situations. Simulating day-to-day tasks and how the candidate will respond is an excellent way to gauge strengths and weaknesses in the real-life environment.

Keep an open mind and focus on the skills the candidate brings to the interview process. A candidate who may have been a good fit for one company does not necessarily mean they would fit well at the next company.

## SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interviewing is a skill. This section provides some possible questions that might be asked during an interview of a possible management associate. All of the questions provided are "open ended" ... those which require an in-depth answer. It is also noted on the questions ones which should be asked of an experienced individual versus someone with less or no experience.

It is suggested that with each interview, besides using some of the sample questions, that the interviewer develop a few open-ended questions which will focus upon the talents of the specific interviewee.

### SETTING THE STAGE

1. Begin the interview by making the candidate comfortable ... offer a beverage, make small talk,
2. Be sure that the interview is conducted in private without interruptions.
3. Take detailed notes during the interview.
4. Listen 80% of the time; talk 20% ... not always easy. If the candidate does not provide an immediate answer to a question, count silently to 10 and wait for an answer. Some people take time to organize their thoughts while others speak quickly. Both behaviors are acceptable.
5. Probe deeply into their responses when you believe you need more information.

### SAMPLE QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about the "best" grocery store you have operated (or "visited" if the candidate lacks experience) and what are three things that made it the "best"?
2. Describe the three to five most successful methods you have used to drive profits in a store (ask if the person has had significant retail experiences)
3. What are the most effective actions you have used to drive sales? (If the person has had experience)
4. Tell me three or four reasons that have caused you to have an interest in this position? (Ask if person lacks experience)
5. What does the term "good merchant" mean to you? (Can be asked if person has had or not had experience)
6. What experience have you had in preparing and managing business plans, budgets and major projects? (Can be asked of any candidate)
7. Describe some of the classes you had that caused you to become interested in retail operations? Which of these classes was your favorite and for what reason? (For those with limited or no experience)
8. Describe the steps you might take to organize a typical work day. (For any candidate)
9. Tell me about what kinds of experiences you have had in leading others? What did you like about the experience and what did you dislike about it? (For any candidate)
10. Give me an example of something you did that made you proud. What was it that caused you to be pleased with the results? (For any candidate)
11. Describe a time when you failed at something. How did you handle the failure? What did you learn from it? (For any candidate)
12. There are two ways to make decisions. One is to act quickly and adjust as necessary. The other is thoroughly analyzing the situation, taking action and "sticking" to your actions. Which way do you prefer and for what reasons? (For any candidate)
13. What actions should a leader take to "win people over" to support a company policy or decision? (For any candidate)
14. Describe the leadership style with which you are most comfortable with and give me a reason for your answer. (For any candidate)

## Best Practices for College Recruiting

Some companies have found college campuses as the best source of finding a strong candidate pool. Successful college recruiting focuses on the long term results. The key to success with college recruiting is establishing and maintaining a relationship with the college professors and Career Offices. These offices will most likely offer career fairs, on-campus recruiting, job postings and other services.

Be sure to select colleges that offer majors that fit your needs. Also consider the quality of their programs and the location of the college.

## Social Media in Recruiting

In this age of instant communications, social media is playing a greater role in recruiting management candidates. More companies are recognizing the value of social media in building their employer brand in the minds of potential candidates. These companies know they need to connect to the Millennial Generation<sup>2</sup> to drive interest in career opportunities. So you need to connect with the media these young people use the most- social media.

- Create and maintain Facebook, Twitter and Google company profiles.
- Keep it personal – have contacts established on these social media sites and respond when questions or inquiries occur.
- Keep you company information and job opportunities up to date.
- Provide some insight into your company not found anywhere else.
- Sell them the sizzle of why they should work for your company.
- An added benefit is it's a relatively low cost form of recruiting.

When developing your Recruitment Strategy take into account the use of social media and see if it would make sense. It should add value to your recruitment effort and provide an avenue to develop your candidate base.

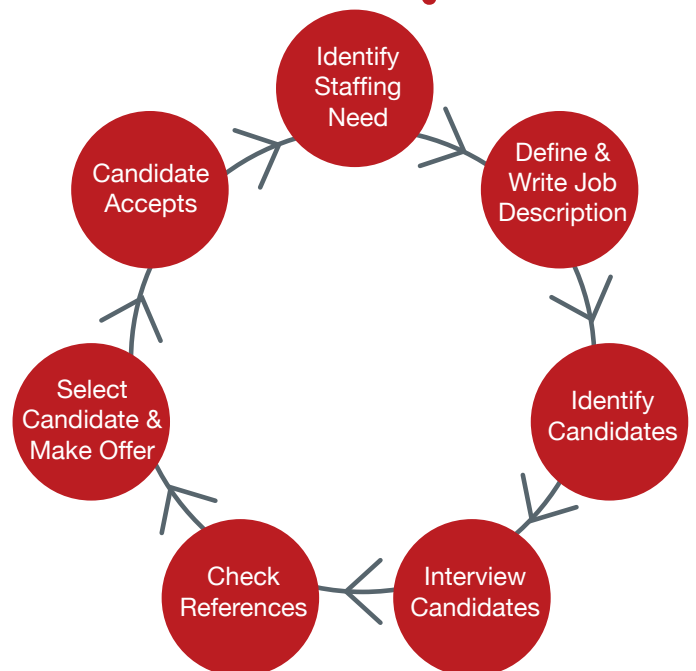
## A Few Additional Tips for Recruiting

- Have a well-defined benefits package prepared and be able to cover the key points during the interview process.
- Take note of the candidates' communication skills both written and verbal.
  - Written: Resume, emails, etc.
  - Verbal: Phone conversations, interview process
- Keep your website up to date and current
- Check References – Actually take time to check out references. Even though they may not be able to provide much information, listen to their tone and how they might express their responses. This can provide insight into the candidate.
- Most importantly, know what your competition is offering. Do a little research to determine how your competition is promoting themselves to potential associates.

## In Summary

Define who you are as a company. What is your culture. Communicate to the potential candidates **WHY** they should come to work for your company. Insure they know your goals and objectives. Never stop looking for your next employee. Recruiting is a proactive function that must be practiced every day.

## Recruitment & Hiring Flow Chart



<sup>2</sup> Born between 1980-1999

# OVERVIEW ORIENTATION

---

Orientation initiates a partnership between the company, the store, the department and the new associate. In the context of this study, an overview orientation is the process used by a company to welcome an associate into the company or into a new position. The purpose of a successful overview orientation program includes:

- Introducing the culture of the business to the new associate.
- Providing the new associate with a full understanding of the total operation of the business.
- Helping to make the associate comfortable in new surroundings.
- Creating a sense of responsibility.
- Preparing an associate for the first steps of skill-based training/development.
- Enabling the new associate to become acquainted with his or her new teammates.

All of the companies in our study have robust, structured orientation programs for both new hires coming into the company and for those individuals who have been given additional responsibility within the company.

**BEST PRACTICES** discovered in all of the companies studied include:

- A structured, consistent orientation program
- A complete introduction to key elements of the position and the company
- A time frame for completion, which varies among the companies in the study

## A Consistent Orientation Program

Having a structured, consistent orientation program is the first step in an effective overview orientation process. Every new employee follows the same orientation agenda. The information covered varies in the **BEST PRACTICES** companies; but, no matter what is covered, a clearly defined program exists in every company.

The function of assuring the overview orientation program is administered consistently is the responsibility of the Human Resources Department, with the support and input of senior and operational management.

Role of Human Resources in overview orientation process:

- Determines what is to be covered in the orientation process.
- Decides how the aspects of the process are to be taught and learned.
- Develops check lists and time lines for completion (if check lists are part of the process).
- Monitors those responsible for administering the program at the local level.
- Reviews the current program regularly to determine and ensure its effectiveness.

Successful orientation programs in our **BEST PRACTICES** companies are dynamic and reviewed constantly for needed changes and upgrades.

# ORIENTATION OVERVIEW

Orientation is the process which welcomes a new associate into the company and represents the first steps in bringing them into the culture. A good orientation program also helps to get the new associate “off on the best footing” to learn and become proficient in the skills required for the job.

This section provides an overview of what a new associate expects from an orientation program and it provides some guidelines on how that individual is made a part of the company.

## GENERAL TOPICS THAT PEOPLE WANT TO KNOW

History and traditions of the company

- How long has the company existed, who started it, who makes-up the current senior leadership team, how did the company get to where it is today and what does it stand for in the community?
- Its business philosophy and values – what is held “dear” by company leadership and the people who work here?
- Because of its history and values, what kinds of consistent behaviors are expected?

## POLICIES

- What does a new associate need to know regarding the everyday “dos” and “don’ts”?
- Where does an associate park his/her car?
- Uniform and name badge policies
- What policies need to be known regarding lockers and personal possessions kept in the store?
- What happens if a person is ill or cannot come to work?
- What about benefits, pay, raises and bonuses?

## WORK RULES

- What are the company productivity standards for the various positions in the store or office?
- How quickly does one get promoted and what does it take to get a promotion?
- What kinds of training/development will be offered?
- What about rules for products purchased at the store, meals while at work and breaks?

## GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- What are the key roles and responsibilities for the position?
- How are evaluations done and how often?
- How frequently are goals measured?
- In what ways are people rewarded for good performance?
- What might happen if performance fails to achieve the goals?

## INTRODUCTION TO OTHER ASSOCIATES

- Who are the key people?
- What responsibilities do other associates have in the organization?

## WHERE THINGS ARE IN THE STORE OR OFFICE

- The tour of the store or office
- Location of “where things are”

## Introduction to Key Elements of the Position and the Company

The orientation process in successful companies touches every new associate in the organization. Depending upon the position, the depth of the program will vary. Also, a current associate who has been promoted to a position in the company requiring more responsibility will undergo relevant aspects of the orientation process. This is done so they thoroughly understand their new roles and responsibilities.

It was discovered that the **BEST PRACTICES** companies orientation programs differed considerably in content for new management associates. While the specific aspects of the programs differed, there were many common threads.

Key aspects of the various overview orientation programs include:

### **COMPANY OVERVIEW BY A SENIOR OFFICER**

The new associate is welcomed by a senior officer who provides an overview of the company, its culture, values and overall strategies. While this can be done in person or by video, most companies in the study had the senior officer make the presentation in person.

### **ADDITIONAL COMPANY OVERVIEW**

Some companies require the new associates to view videos and hear presentations with additional company history, values and culture. As one representative from a **BEST PRACTICES** company said, "This practice is to introduce the way we do things and the reasons for doing them our way".

### **DETAILED STORE AND DISTRIBUTION CENTER TOURS**

This enables the new associate to learn about how the company works by seeing the operations in **ACTION** and permitting the new person to ask questions during the tour. Also, the tour gives the new associate an opportunity to meet other associates in the company. All companies in our study provide a detailed store tour. A tour of the distribution center was also common among chains and for those independents who engage in self-distribution.

### **PAPERWORK**

Introduces the new associate to company forms and reports and how they are to be properly handled.

### **COMPLIANCE ISSUES**

Explains various compliance practices, such as harassment and safety, and how they are to be followed in the company. In this area, it was found that electronic-learning (E-learning) modules are common as a teaching and record-keeping tool.

### **WORK RULES**

Provides expectations concerning daily behaviors and company practices. As with compliance issues, E-learning teaching modules support and create records for what is covered orally.

### **CUSTOMER SERVICE**

At least one company in our study provides 15 hours of customer service training to the new associate during the overview orientation process.

**BASIC TRAINING 101** – for those who have no retail experience prior to coming into the company, an overview of basic retail operations is presented in the classroom and through detailed visits of operational areas.

### **AN OVERVIEW OF THE ASSOCIATE'S RESPONSIBILITY WITHIN THE COMPANY**

The stepping stone for learning the roles and responsibilities of the position which takes place in an extensive skills-based training and development program.

# SAMPLE STORE TOUR

Covered detailed examples of an in-depth store tour for a new store management associate.

A really great Store Tour for management trainees is more than just a walkthrough of the various departments and a “meet and greet” of store associates. A really great Store Tour should introduce the trainee to the culture, philosophy and strategies of the business.

## INTRODUCTION - OVERVIEW

The start of a great Store Tour should be an introduction and explanation by senior store management as to type of “store format” and its marketing strategy. The marketing strategy should be explained in terms of store size, store layout, strategic placement of departments, store advertising strategy and promotional activity. The key goals of sales and profitability should be explained in terms that relate to the various departments and their contribution. Expense control should be emphasized in respect to the store’s construction for efficiency and cost saving advantages. The overall philosophy of Customer Care needs to be emphasized and explained in terms of the company culture.

## DEPARTMENTAL TOURS

Departmental tours can be conducted in any number of arrangements. One of the more popular arrangements is to group departments in the following order:

- Meat
- Grocery
- Front End
- Seafood
- HBC
- Customer Service
- Produce
- GM
- Back Office Operations
- Deli
- Bakery
- Dairy
- Frozen

## MEAT, SEAFOOD, PRODUCE, DELI, BAKERY, DAIRY, FROZEN

These perimeter departments usually represent the most profitable departments. Emphasis should be placed on their contribution to overall profitability. As each tour of these departments is conducted the following key elements should be emphasized.

- Proper receiving and storage of product
- Proper handling and preparation methods for product
- Merchandising layout and strategies
- Advertising and promotional strategies
- Dating requirements and freshness control

- General Ordering procedures and delivery schedules
- Pricing strategy
- Signage as it relates to merchandising and promotions
- Shrink control
- DSD Vendors (how they relate to departmental merchandising and operations)
- General understanding of health laws and compliance

A special addition to any tour of the perishable departments is a “sampling” of some of the items unique to the store or that are considered items the store is most noted for.

## GROCERY, HBC, GM

These departments are usually grouped as the non-perishable departments. Although Grocery is not as profitable as most of the other departments it is a significant contributor to volume and overall gross profit. The usual integration of GM and HBC into the grocery store set with strategic placement is a key to the success and contribution of the departments. As each tour of these departments is conducted the following key elements should be emphasized.

- Proper receiving of product and warehouse storage
- Departmental aisle layout and product placement strategy
- HBC and GM product placement in respect to “tie in Sales”
- Advertising and promotional strategy
- Display philosophy and strategy
- Signage as it relates to merchandising and promotion
- General ordering procedures and delivery schedules
- Pricing strategies
- Shrink control
- DSD Vendors (how they relate to departmental merchandising and operations)

## FRONT END (CHECKOUT OPERATIONS)

A great Store Tour includes time well spent in the Front End (or Checkout Operations). The follow are some key elements that should be emphasized in the tour.

- General scheduling philosophy
- Requirements to be a cashier or bagger
- What training is required of a cashier or bagger
- General register operations / features
- Customer Service policies and procedures

## CUSTOMER SERVICE

A great Store Tour includes time spent in the Customer Service area.

The following are some key elements that should be emphasized.

- Requirements to work in the Customer Services area
- What are the various services provided
- What training is required to staff Customer Service
- What are their overall responsibilities

## BACK OFFICE OPERATIONS

A great Store Tour includes time spent in the having a general understanding of the back office operations. The following are some key elements that should be emphasized.

- How is the back office staffed
- What are the general responsibilities
- How does the back office interact with the Front End operations and Customer Service
- What is the general flow of paperwork (e.g. invoices and paid outs)
- What books and records are kept in the Back Office
- Who is authorized to have access
- How is the money handled and what are the security procedures

## COMPETITION

A great Store Tour includes time allocated with a visit to the competitor’s stores. Management should always be keenly aware of what the competition is doing. A tour of a competitor should pay special attention to:

- Store format
- General merchandising and promotional strategies
- Pricing philosophy
- Level of Customer Service
- Condition of perishable departments
- Overall store appearance and store conditions

## CONCLUSION

A great Store Tour is much more than just a quick walk through of the departments and meeting the associates. A great Store Tour is a below the surface look at the philosophy, culture and operations of the store. It’s a look into the why and how a store functions.



# ORIENTATION SCHEDULE

Orientation is the process which welcomes a new associate into the company and represents the first steps in bringing them into the culture. A good orientation program also helps to get the new associate “off on the best footing” to learn and become proficient in the skills required for the job.

This section provides an overview of what a new associate expects from an orientation program and it provides some guidelines on how that individual is made a part of the company.

## FIRST DAY

Introduction to:

- Key management associates (overall store and departments)
- Coworkers

## REVIEW OF

- Meetings
- Job assignments
- Uniform/name badge guidelines
- Work schedule and how communicated

## TOURS OF

- Store or office
- Break rooms
- Rest Rooms
- Lockers or storage area

## OTHER ELEMENTS

- Associate Comfort
- Small amount of work
- Arranged lunch or break
- Answer Questions
- Comments and questions from new associate concerning the first day

## FIRST WEEK

- Company orientation – history, values, overall expectations ( a formal process)
- Answer questions
- Assess needs and begin training
- Meet instructor
- Complete all appropriate paper work
- Company standards regarding health, sanitation, safety
- Learn to operate equipment
- Job description overview
- Learn about company benefits in detail
- Review of practices, policies and procedures
- Feedback from the new hire regarding “how things are going”

## FIRST/SECOND MONTHS

- Answer questions
- Continue training on job area
- Performance expectations and feedback on job performance
- Work practices and procedure
- Performance standards
- Continued feedback from new hire regarding “how things are going” and feedback and redirection from instructors on job performance

## Time Frame for Completion of Overview Orientation

None of the **BEST PRACTICES** companies identical time frames for completion of the overview orientation process.

Because of the material covered, the **COMPLETION PROCESS FOR ALL COMPANIES WAS NO LESS THAN ONE WEEK. FOR SOME, IT WAS TWO WEEKS OR MORE.**

For new management associates, especially for those who have not worked in retail, the overall overview orientation process prepares them for what will be encountered in the training/development process. Through the overview orientation, they will become aware of the history and values of their new company. They have a clearer understanding of the pace, urgency, intensity and customer service aspects of a successful retail company. Finally, they have knowledge of the company’s expectations for every associate.

# TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT

Our **BEST PRACTICES** companies all have in place clearly defined training/development programs for those assuming responsible positions. All of the programs provided by the various companies are structured, organized and built around the competencies and skills required for a person who is being promoted or slotted into a defined management role.

Common elements of training/development were discovered in our targeted group of companies and they include:

- Training and development is seen as an investment not as a cost center.
- The job description, in many cases, serves as a guide to determine the skills to be taught.
- The curriculum is focused and has purposeful outcomes.
- Instructors are chosen carefully and are capable and qualified in carrying-out their duties.
- Several of the best practices companies have in place internal university programs unique to fulfilling specific learning needs within a company.
- Scorecards are in place to measure the success of the various training/development processes.
- Training/development is on-going and it takes place throughout the career of an associate.

## Training & Development is an Investment, Not a Cost Center

A common trait of all of the best practices companies in this study is that training and development of management associates is regarded as an investment. People development is seen as a key part of a company's succession planning process. The investment is made in new management hires that are brought into the company, as well as for high potential internal promotion candidates.

There is a corporate budget for the learning processes. In almost every company the cost of training/development is absorbed at the corporate office level and not charged-back as an **expense** to individual stores. This practice prevents those at store level from shortening or skipping prescribed learning processes due to local demands on store profitability.

## The Job Description Serves as a Guide to Determine the Skills to be Taught

The importance of the job description was mentioned earlier in the section regarding recruitment. As training and development

programs are designed and implemented, significant attention is given to:

- The work environment surrounding the functions and requirements of the position.
- The skills and competencies required for a person to be successful in the job.
- The on-going challenges presented by the job.

Whether the candidate for the position is new to the company or a current high potential associate, the job description will be the same for both and the learning curriculum will be designed to support the position.

## The Curriculum is Focused and Has Purposeful Outcomes

The next step in the process is to design a curriculum which focuses upon the necessary skill sets to be taught. Each of our **BEST PRACTICES** companies approach curriculum development somewhat differently. However, one common practice is for the company to utilize corporate department heads or store department heads, with the assistance of the company's Human Resource Department, to develop and write various learning agendas. The length of time to complete a curriculum will be determined by the complexities of the skills and number of functions to be taught.

We learned in our study that our **BEST PRACTICES** companies have in place learning agendas for individuals who have been promoted into positions of overall store management, whether from the outside or inside the company. In these cases, there are general hands-on classes to provide that person an overview of a department and to become aware of skills that are required to operate a successful department. The trainee is not expected to become a departmental **EXPERT**, but instead someone with enough general knowledge so that as the new overall manager he or she can:

- Understand departmental operations.
- Converse comfortably with the various department heads and departmental associates.
- Observe the department from the perspective of a customer.
- Identify possible problem areas within a department.
- Be empathetic to possible issues which are common in a department.
- Coach department management in the solution of problems.

It depends on the individual company, but after observing several, learning agendas were developed most often for:

- Grocery (includes frozen and dairy)
- Meat
- Produce
- Delicatessen (food service)
- Bakery
- Seafood
- Front-end

Besides departmental operations knowledge, there are other areas which require attention for the newly promoted individual. Knowledge of operational finances is taught often by the supervisor, store director or company executive. This often is a one-on-one process where the instructor **TEACHES** the operating statement, labor scheduling and other functions. Other functions requiring one-on-one learning include POS (point of sale) activities, backdoor receiving and security. Usually, these functions are taught by a front office individual or someone in the store who has detailed knowledge of the topic to be taught. As with the various departments, the curriculum is developed to enable all the instructors to cover the key points.

## Instructors are Chosen Carefully and are Capable and Qualified

Not everyone who is **knowledgeable** of a skill or business process has the ability to be a good instructor. A spokesperson for one of the national chains interviewed for the study said, “The selection of those who conduct training for newly promoted management associates is a difficult task”. It takes more than knowledge to be a good teacher.

Once the curriculum has been developed, someone must teach it. In the various companies different methods were used to teach the materials to the trainees. Some companies have **TRAINING STORES** where most of those who teach the material reside. Others have **TRAINING DEPARTMENTS** in various stores where trainees are sent to learn the material from the most effective instructor. There is no best method. It depends upon where a company’s instructors reside.

In the **BEST PRACTICES** companies the better instructors or trainers have similar characteristics:

- Have good practical knowledge and experience of learning topics
- Capable of developing and following an instructional plan using the learning agenda
- Able to follow a process and present material in a way that it is clearly understood

- Patient and is willing to work with the trainees so that learning takes place
- Good listening skills and practices the art of asking good questions
- Humble, not arrogant
- Creative and can adapt to the trainees and find ways, sometimes unique, to teach a skill or process
- Possess a good sense of humor

These individuals also are skilled in knowing the best learning style of the individual trainee – auditory, visual or hands-on and knowing when to apply each of the styles.

In one large regional convenience store company, being a skills-based trainer is a promotion. In our study it was learned that the total learning process covers a period from 16 weeks to two years, depending upon the length of time an individual learner spends in a particular department or functional area. It should be mentioned that the two year time span was in an independent company. **BEST PRACTICES** companies have found - through experience - learning processes cannot be rushed, must be clearly defined, executed and taught.

Some **BEST PRACTICES** companies utilize **MENTORS**. The mentor is an existing store manager or assistant manager assigned to the new management trainee. This person’s function is to be the **GO-TO-PERSON** for the trainee. The mentor is there to answer questions, give detailed explanations, provide insight and provide general coaching for the trainee. Mentors are becoming more broadly used by both independent retailers and the larger chains.

## Company Universities

The company’s name followed by the word **UNIVERSITY** is the term several companies in our study use to describe their overall learning and developmental processes. In this sense, the term **UNIVERSITY** does not connote an academic entity. It is used instead to encompass much of what a company does to develop its people. One large regional chain includes four different **SCHOOLS** in its university program – School of Retention Management (focuses on newer employees who have not determined a career path, the trainee works in as many as 14 different areas over a 3-6 week period); School of Business Management (departmental managers take several classes over several months); School of Business Leadership (those wishing to become a department manager or store director) and Masters of Retail Operations (hand-selected, intensive 12 month program for the next store director).

The remainder of this section will describe specifically what some of the **BEST PRACTICES** companies offer for management development:

One large regional independent in the Middle West has in place a program known as its **LEADERSHIP ACADEMY**. This four year old program has helped to **CHANGE THE COMPANY'S CULTURE** and has a waiting list of attendees. One key purpose of the program is to build the company's **BENCH STRENGTH**. Generally, the participants are high potentials from within the company and those chosen are seen by the company senior management as having the ability to fill leadership positions in the future. Currently, the number of trainees who can take the class is limited to 25. The learning processes provided by the class covers a two-year period with classes held once a quarter. Topics include leadership (the company president conducts one of these classes), operational areas, supermarket math, and human resource functions. For each class there is an assignment to be completed by the trainee.

Another regional independent found in the Ozarks has in place a one year program designed to ready a potential store manager for promotion. The number of trainees in the program is 8-10 at all times. Those in the program can be new people or high potentials that have been with the company for a while. Since it is on-going, people come into it and leave it at different times as they complete their courses. The focus is on operations and functional areas and helps in the development of the company's bench of potential leaders.

A West Coast regional independent is in the 9th year of its leadership program. It was developed for current store associates who the company defines as **UP AND COMERS**. The class is limited to 25 participants and those in the program are self-nominated. The actual participants are chosen by senior management from the list of nominees. It is a one-year program focused upon operational issues and classes are held monthly. Assignments are given at the conclusion of each class and the trainees report on their assignment at the beginning of the next class. The final presentation focuses upon a problem area discovered by the trainee and its solution must be long term and demonstrate a financial improvement. Most of the company's current leadership team members are products of the program.

**BEST PRACTICES** companies use the **UNIVERSITY** approach to assure that the **PIPELINE** of future leaders is never empty. It is used for educating new associates coming into the company. Especially for independents, it is used to develop and prepare its crop of high potentials and get them ready for more responsibility.

## Benchmarking to Measure Success

In every company in the study, measurement processes are in place to determine the success of the educational programs. In many of them, the Department of Human Resources plays an active role in monitoring the results. This is done in various ways:

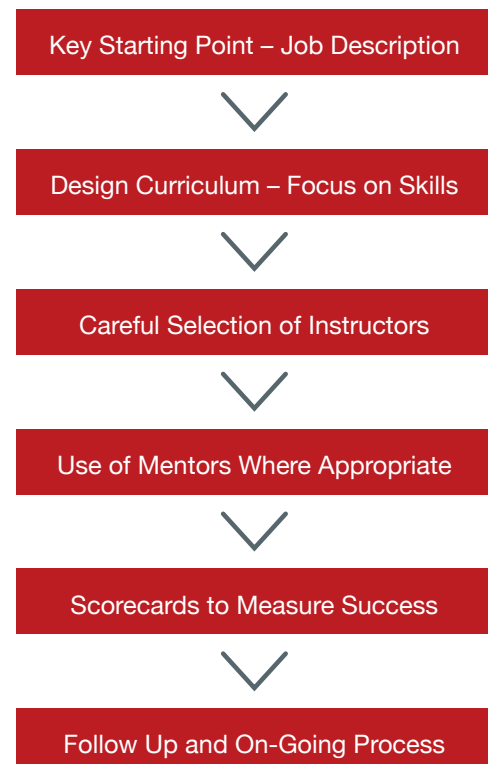
- Track the number of promotions and success factors of those who have been a part of the management educational programs.
- Turnover of management personnel over time.
- Better operational results over time because of specific departmental training.
- Secret shopper visits indicating a better retail experience.
- Improved results as great place to work as indicated in culture surveys.
- A full pipeline of people capable of more responsibility in management positions.

## Training and Development is an On-Going Process

Every one of our **BEST PRACTICES** companies sees the development of its people as a responsibility and a prerequisite for promotion. It assures a stable group of leaders, ensures the company culture is supported and passed-on, helps to create a **GREAT PLACE TO WORK** environment and is always regarded as an investment.

Learning is never ending and companies that make an investment in growing people are rewarded by growth and profitability.

## Developmental Steps for Training



## CAREER PATHING

Provides an example of some methods independent **operators** use to provide an in-depth training process to strengthen its bench so it is ready when growth opportunities arise.

In our study we learned that independent retailers have an opportunity to provide a more in-depth training curriculum than the larger retailers. The smaller retailers have less demand to turn out management staffing in a shortened timeframe. They have greater time period in which to provide a more detailed and concentrated training agenda. Some of the retailers in the category will use up to 2 years for their training process.

The example below takes into account the more profitable departments receive a longer training cycle. Most of these departments take monthly inventories and the extended training period affords an opportunity to have the trainee participate in one or two inventory cycles.

Also, many training programs combine Customer Service, Front End and Back Office into one training module. The smaller operator is afforded the time to break these training components into separate modules.

### EXAMPLE – 2 YEAR TRAINING AGENDA

DEPARTMENT	MONTHS
Grocery	2
Produce	2
Meat	2
Dairy	½
Frozen	½
HBC	½
Deli	1 ½
Bakery	1 ½
Front End	1 ½
Customer Service	1
Back Office/Financials	1

---

**TOTAL 14**

The remaining 10 months are assigned as a storewide assistant manager.

The store owner/manager or assistant manager acts as a “mentor” throughout the entire two-year training cycle. The mentor functions as the “go-to-person” for the trainee. The mentor is there to answer questions, give detailed explanations, provide insight and provide general coaching for the trainee.

# BENCHMARKS AND MEASUREMENTS

---

All of the **best practices** companies have developed benchmark methods to measure the success and progress of their development programs. The methods vary from company-to-company, even though similarities exist among the companies. The findings include:

- During and at the completion of the learning processes, certified instructors, through their personal observations and use of check lists, measure the learning progress of the individual trainee.
- An instructor consistently compares how each participant in the learning program has done against others who have previously completed the program.
- A key component of one independent company's program is to assure that the participant understands the concept of the total store. A store is not made-up of a group of independently acting departments. Instead, a store is composed of interdependently functioning departments that must function together as a team. Having a trainee spend time in each department is done so the future leader can understand how the departments work and function together as one interdependent operating unit.
- In our study the chain stores, both national and regional, put more emphasis on the concept of career pathing for the future leader. In their programs, future leaders are often assigned a mentor. The role of the mentor is to meet with the person frequently and discuss the person's progress and consult on issues of concern. The future leaders in these companies understand what steps must be taken to move to the next level within the organization.

To become a store director, certain positions have to be filled successfully by the future leader before promotions to the next level are made. In one national convenience store company, every person in the organization must work first in one of the stores. Once that duty is completed, then advancements are made into other functional areas that support the future leader's long term aspirations.



# OBSTACLES TO A SUCCESSFUL PROGRAM

All of our **BEST PRACTICES** companies admitted that achieving success for its program sometimes has its obstacles. The most common obstacles and how they are addressed (in no particular order) are as follows:

1. For smaller companies, its size may prevent significant on-going opportunities for advancement. Often the pool of qualified applicants may be larger than the number of existing growth opportunities.

First, the company has to recognize this potential challenge. To meet it, the company has to be creative in finding ways to keep enthusiasm high among its future leaders. During the **WAITING PERIOD**, the company might make lateral promotions for these high potential candidates, let them work in other departments or give them more responsibilities in their current jobs. It is indeed an issue and one which constantly needs to be addressed in order to retain talent until promotional opportunities open-up.

2. It was mentioned that if there is not total commitment from senior management, these programs will fail. Unless top management regards this endeavor as an investment and a strategic initiative rather than a cost, problems will develop.

Unless the leadership development program is a budgeted item at the corporate level, it has the potential to become a victim of cost cutting at the local level.

3. Sometimes the program is put together in haste with little emphasis on strategic outcomes. The educational agenda must be clearly defined and one the company can implement. It has to be designed to meet the strategic needs of the company and have clear outcomes defined for both the instructors and trainees.

4. The individuals who conduct the training processes must be capable, qualified and follow a curriculum. Surprisingly, it was mentioned that as programs were being created, not enough attention was put on the recruitment and development of the training staff. Sometimes assumptions were made that because a department manager was skilled and produced strong numbers, that individual would be a **NATURAL TEACHER**. That assumption was often wrong and led to problems during the learning processes. Instead, time should be spent identifying the people who have teaching skills, are willing to follow an established curriculum and evaluate the performance of others.

5. It was discovered in a few of the **BEST PRACTICES** companies that as training programs were implemented some **TRAINING** stores were not providing the time necessary to complete the learning agenda. Since the cost of the program was being absorbed at the headquarters level, this infraction of the rules was dealt with strongly. In at least one company, if a store failed to support the time requirements of the training program, it was decertified as a **TRAINING STORE**.

6. Failure to provide good follow-up practices was a common issue the **BEST PRACTICES** companies learned to confront. Most noted were failure to follow-up with training processes which required improvement, mentoring and failure to develop a career path with the trainee.

To prevent this, companies learned to implement their own good record keeping and feedback processes. In many of the **BEST PRACTICES** companies these processes became the responsibility of the Human Resources Department.

7. One company spokesperson indicated that because of fast growth, sometimes high potential candidates were promoted before all training/development processes were completed. To deal with this issue, the company had to take a more disciplined approach and hold-back promotions until the learning process has been accomplished. The Human Resource Department has become the **GATE KEEPER** to assure that training is completed. If it becomes necessary to make the promotion earlier, plans are put in place for the associate so that additional training is completed later on a reasonable agreeable timetable.

# SUMMARY

---

The independent food retailer of today faces a real challenge in attracting and retaining top notch management talent to his organization. A food retailer must have a vision and a strategy regarding what is to be accomplished in respect to management staffing. There must be a well-conceived workforce plan. Candidates must be recruited who have personalities and values that fit the culture of his company, then...**HIRE FOR ATTITUDE AND TRAIN FOR SKILLS.**

A great plan must include a career path for management. The associates must feel they have a future with your company and there is opportunity and a plan for them to further their career. A key to success for the food retailer is the stability offered by retention of the associate.

A well-orchestrated overview orientation agenda is imperative to getting off on the right foot with a new management candidate. The new candidate must be familiar with the culture and values of the company. They must have an understanding of the pace and the heartbeat of the company and what the company expectations are for the associates.

A new candidate must complete a well-conceived and comprehensive training process utilizing competent trainers. The training program must be built around competencies and skills required for the job. Follow up and on-going training is a key to the success and retention of top management talent.

There will be obstacles and it is important for the retailer to recognize those obstacles and have a strategy to overcome them.

The future viability of the retail food industry depends on a vibrant, dedicated, knowledgeable management workforce that can enhance and grow the industry to the future.