



## Section 4

# Recruiting and Retaining

**L**eaders who are interested in building a better newsroom know that it takes “good people”—the right people with the right skills in the right jobs. NPR managing editor Bill Marimow says hiring the right people is the most important thing any manager can do. “You can have the best management structure in the world and have the wrong people and have a bad news organization.”

Recruiting, hiring and retaining good people are, therefore, essential to the news director’s success. How does a news manager find and hire those people? What does it take to get them to stay, given that turnover is a fact of life in most newsrooms?

One way to stay on top of the personnel carousel and find those “good” people is to stay in recruiting mode at all times. Instead of feeling overwhelmed by the stacks of resume tapes threatening to overrun your office, think of the tapes as a way to keep tabs on candidates with potential. Consider scheduling time to review a few tapes at a time on a regular basis, even if you’re not hiring.

“Recruiting is a 24/7 part of the job, particularly in medium and smaller markets,” says Ken Jobe, vice president of news at WHBQ-TV in Memphis, TN. To make sure he has a strong pool of candidates when an opening occurs, Jobe invests a lot of time in finding and tracking

potential employees. “If I see a person with promise, I’ll write them with comments on their tape even if we don’t have an opening,” he says. Jobe routinely critiques several people once a quarter. It takes 20 minutes, he says, and can really pay off.

“Pre-planning is the most important part of hiring,” says KTVU-TV associate news director Janice Gin in San Francisco-Oakland. “Evaluate the needs of the newsroom separately from the job you have to fill.” Gin suggests asking two basic questions: What are your objectives for the team you are trying to build, and what is your commitment to the new hire? “You should also hire people who will fit your newsroom and station culture. If your culture values diversity, you will want to make sure your new hire enhances that value.”

Gin also urges hiring managers to consider whether they have the time to train a new employee before bringing in someone who needs hands-on guidance. “If it’s budget time, you may not be able to afford to hire someone you need to pay close attention to, unless you have someone on staff who can do the coaching,” she says. Once you know your personal commitment to a new hire and the newsroom’s overall needs, says Gin, it’s easier to recruit the right people and to trim down the list of candidates.

Knowing the newsroom’s strengths also makes recruiting easier. WBAL-AM news director Mark Miller says he sells his Baltimore station as a place where people will want to work by selling the quality of the reporting. That tells candidates they can learn from the best. “I make clear up front that I am going to try to grow [their] careers,” Miller says. Letting job candidates know how current and former employees have excelled in the profession can make your

## RECRUITING TIPS

Attend journalism conventions and critique tapes to spot talent

Screen and respond to promising tape submissions

Stay in touch with potential hires

Enlist your staff in spotting talent

Mine close-by markets

newsroom a more attractive destination.

The Poynter Institute’s Scott Libin, former news director at KSTP-TV in Minneapolis-St. Paul, believes a constructive newsroom culture can be a recruiting tool. “Let potential hires roam the newsroom and get the real story. They can learn things from non-managers, and even if not all of it is flattering, it’s best to get it out at the outset.” WTSP-TV’s vice president and news director, Lane Michaelsen, shares his station’s written job expectations with potential hires because they

reflect the importance of making work fun and they speak to the environment of the newsroom. (See “Automatics” under the Conducting Feedback and Evaluations section.) Michaelsen says, “People tend to enjoy working here.”

Because a “good fit” matters to Gin, she questions prospective hires to see how much they know about the station. “I want to see if they’ve done their homework.” She also has prospects meet with all newsroom managers so the other managers can weigh in.

### Diversity Matters

Recruiting a diverse workforce takes additional effort, news managers say, but the payoff is worth it. “You need to have a mix of ideas, backgrounds, cultures,” says general manager Patti Smith of KVUE-TV in Austin, TX. A diverse staff not only reflects the diversity of the community, but it also brings ideas and perspectives into the newsroom that might otherwise be missed. “Building diversity takes a long-term commitment,” says Susana Schuler, vice president and corporate news director of Nexstar Broadcasting Group.



## Section 4

A variety of strategies can help build a more diverse staff:

- **Patience** Be willing to wait a little longer and look a little harder to find well-qualified, diverse candidates.
- **Accountability** Hold managers more accountable for hiring a diverse staff.
- **Partnerships** Ask people of color on staff whether they would be willing to help recruit new employees. Work with minority journalism groups to enrich your applicant pool.
- **Awareness** Be aware of the climate in your newsroom and community and understand how that climate will affect minority employees.
- **Support** Help new hires make the transition to both the newsroom and the community.

### Hiring Processes That Work

Resume tapes are a starting point when you're looking for candidates, but Jobe says he never hires from a resume tape alone. "I call back and ask for an average week of stories or broadcasts," he says, to get a better idea of the person's day-to-day work. If they make the cut, he'll bring them in for an interview. In addition to strong

### RETENTION TIPS

Demonstrate that you care

Encourage professional development

Set high professional standards

Give praise and recognition

Show a path to career advancement

journalism skills, he looks for a strong work ethic and a passion for the business. Jobe also wants to learn more about candidates as individuals. "I'm a dinner-and-a-beer guy," he says. "I want to know what they do for fun."

When Schurz Communications executive Marci Burdick was a small-market news director, she says, she knew that many of her new hires wouldn't stay with her long. "I spent a lot of time ... asking what people wanted to be after

working for me, and then helping them achieve. I told people upfront, you will make mistakes. New hires got assigned to a person for 90 days who would be signing off on their work and looking at tapes."

Once a decision is made about filling a job, it's important to let everyone know—including any finalists who were not selected. Instead of sending an impersonal letter, Jobe calls those candidates to tell them they didn't get the job, and why. Often it's because he has promoted someone from inside the station, so he'll encourage applicants to try again. "When they hear that someone was promoted from within, it tells them that if they got in, they could be promoted," he says.

### Getting New Hires Started Right

Letting someone know they got the job isn't the end of the hiring process; it's just the beginning.



**"The best leader is the one who has sense enough to pick good men to do what he wants done and self-restraint enough to keep from meddling with them while they do it."**

THEODORE ROOSEVELT



**“You’re only as good as the people you hire.”**

RAY KROC, FOUNDER OF MCDONALD’S

Before a new staffer even arrives in town, here are some things you can do to help them get acclimated:

- **Send a welcome packet** Include the basics about your station’s brand and newsroom philosophy as well as background on the community and advice on finding housing.
- **Make them read** A subscription to the local paper or a link to the online edition is one way to help a new hire feel a part of the community even before he or she arrives.
- **Introduce them** Provide the new hire with email addresses or phone numbers of key newsroom staff, including the anchors and producers they’re most likely to work with at the start. Encourage them to touch base before the start date.

Orientation at many television stations consists of a whirlwind tour, during which the new hire gets a photo ID, a packet of forms, and a computer login. For many new hires, the first day on the job also includes writing or reporting for one or more newscasts. Bringing someone in who can hit the ground running is a goal in most newsrooms, but without some preparation, a new hire can trip and fall flat and may even harm the news organization. Investing time at the front end can pay off over the long haul.

News 8 Austin (a 24-hour cable news operation) has developed a formal four-week orientation program. Each new employee gets a 30-day training plan—a checklist of skills to master and assignments to complete—that a supervisor must sign off on, one by one. Every reporter and photojournalist spends a week on the assignment desk, a week with producers in the control room, and a week learning online web production. Associate producers spend a week with photographers in the field. The training guides also

include steps to complete to be eligible for promotion. An entry-level associate producer can see clearly what the career path is to producer and then to executive producer. News director Kevin Benz says that providing a career path gives employees hope for advancement and places the responsibility for success on the employee.

News 8 Austin also pairs new staffers with a mentor on the same or similar schedule. An incoming assignment editor is paired with a desk mentor, who provides daily guidance and weekly progress reports to the employee and the assignment manager. An associate producer works with an experienced producer mentor and meets weekly with an executive producer to discuss performance. The system ensures that new hires get training and support.

Other stations take a variety of steps to bring new hires up to speed:

- **Make the rounds** Introduce the new person to all departments, not just the newsroom, and don’t try to do it all in one day.
- **Show them the ropes** It may seem obvious, but new hires need time to adjust to new systems: voice mail, email, scripting, and editing.
- **Pair them up** Even if you don’t have a formal mentoring program, put new reporters with veteran photojournalists, or let new producers shadow your best producers.
- **Be social** Organize an informal gathering to help your new hire start getting to know co-workers on a more casual basis.
- **Stay available** Touch base every few days at the start, to see how things are going. Check in with other news managers as well as the new hire’s peers, and provide frequent feedback for the first three months. (See the Conducting Feedback and Evaluations section.)



## Section 4

### Retention

In 35 years as a news director at WISH-TV in Indianapolis, Lee Giles hired plenty of people, many of whom stayed around for the long term. That wasn't just happenstance. "As I hired I looked for two things," Giles says. "People who wanted to work for this TV station and stability—people who liked the Midwest and wanted to stay here."

Jobe uses similar criteria in Memphis. "If I have two equal applicants, I will pick someone from here because they hit the ground running and because I think they'll stay longer," he says. "That has proved to be true."

Hiring people who want to make a long-term commitment to the community is one way to build your retention rate, but it's not the only way. Obviously, a competitive starting salary and regular raises help keep employees satisfied, but research shows that people generally don't stay in jobs just for the money.

According to a study of nearly 6,000 workers across all industries by human-resources consulting firm Towers Perrin, other factors matter more:

- **Relationships** People leave jobs when they have to work for bad managers.

- **Reputation** People want to work for a winner. A station's reputation as a good employer helps to keep employees engaged.
- **Teamwork** People stay when they like their colleagues and co-workers.
- **Clarity** People stay when they feel fully informed about what the company expects and what they can expect in return.
- **Recognition** People appreciate being recognized for good work, and rewards don't have to be financial.
- **Development** People want the chance to learn new skills, to grow and to move up.

Mentoring, formal or informal, can help a newsroom keep and groom good employees for advancement. At WBAL-AM in Baltimore, staff veterans serve as mentors to new hires, providing regular coaching and guidance. (See "Coaching for Success" under the Conducting Feedback and Evaluations section.)

Studies say the No. 1 thing that motivates people to leave jobs is their relationship with their immediate supervisor. "A bad manager causes you to leave," says Chris Michalak, talent management practices leader at Towers Perrin, "but that doesn't mean a good manager causes you to stay." What employees really want is a sense that their work is valued and that they are contributing to a good organization.



**"A strong leader knows that if he develops his associates he will be even stronger."**

JAMES F. LINCOLN, AMERICAN INDUSTRIALIST AND PHILOSOPHER, 1883-1965