

KEY STRATEGIES



for Hiring & Retaining

Top Talent

for your Independent
Insurance Agency



strategic.insurance.software
Agency Management Systems

CONTENTS

Intro	3
Part 1: Attracting Qualified Applicants	4
Part 2: Hiring	7
Part 3: Retention	10
Conclusion.....	13

INTRO

Growing your business takes more than customers and streamlined office procedures. It also takes a top-notch staff of talented individuals. In today's climate, however, finding and hiring said staff is not as easy as it sounds. Many college grads are being lured to jobs perceived to be either more glamorous or more lucrative than insurance. In fact, a recent article published in Cover and written by Jaco de Jager titled "Attracting new insurance talent—can we learn from the land down under?" stated, "The field of insurance ranked a lowly 20th out of 21 industries that students are interested in."ⁱ To complicate matters, many in the industry are inching toward retirement. de Jager's article also mentions research performed by Accenture which stated that 50 percent of today's insurance agents will retire in the next 10 years and for every two agents that retire there is only one college graduate ready to replace them.ⁱⁱ

All that highlights the importance of continually attracting qualified applicants.

This eGuide highlights some key strategies for finding, hiring and retaining top talent.

Part 1: Attracting Qualified Applicants

Attracting talented individuals to your agency is much like making a major purchase. It requires an intentional mindset. The best time to be looking to build your team is when you don't have to. Think about it this way. When you wait until your car breaks down or your HVAC system goes out to purchase a new one you are in a tight spot. Urgency drives the decision-making process, and options you might evaluate if you felt you had the time are left unexplored. You may end up with the product at the best price, and then again you may not. Looking when you aren't in fire drill mode enables a more thoughtful decision process. This applies to the hiring process as well. Building a potential list of candidates and resources ahead of time affords you the time necessary to develop relationships and get a better understanding of the candidates you are evaluating.

Look to industry and community connections

Consider the different organizations in which you participate in as a source of both candidates AND candidate referrals. These organizations could be anything from industry associations to the local Chamber of Commerce. Every interaction is an opportunity to make a new connection or discover your next “best producer.” Keep a tickler of people you meet who you would consider to represent your agency.

Consider implementing a referral program

Identify your top associates and look to them to find “like” individuals that may be a fit for your agency. Offer some type of incentive (days off, monetary, gift card) for a referral that becomes an associate.

Establish different tactics for recruiting young agents

While age should never be the overriding factor in who you hire, it is a well-known fact that many independent agencies have been wrestling with ways to attract young professionals into the field. So how can you attract young insurance agents that will not only replace the leaving workforce, but bring new ideas and skills to the industry? Here is a list of suggestions for attracting young agents to the field:

- **Get social**—Once ubiquitous, classified ads are almost a thing of the past. Today’s college grads have grown up in the world of social media. Post ads on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter...even Craigslist.



“Internships are an excellent way for both you and the intern to test the waters without making a full commitment.”

- **Get creative**—Participate in career campaign that highlights the scope of the insurance industry and the immense extent of opportunities in the field. You can accomplish this by attending career fairs and providing information booklets to high schools, universities, and tech schools outlining the benefits of working in the insurance industry.
- **Get connected**—Reach out to local colleges and universities to establish an internship program. Internships are an excellent way for both you and the intern to test the waters without making a full commitment.
- **Get recognition**—Gain publicity both for your agency and your agents by recognizing young insurance professionals with awards and scholarships.
- **Get your younger employees involved in the recruiting process**—Job seekers are more inclined to picture themselves working with their peers than they are to those in their parents' or grandparents' age bracket.
- **Demonstrate a path to advancement**—Offer and promote learning opportunities that will in turn provide the ability for upward mobility.



Part 2: Hiring

A vital way to hire new employees is to build a standardized hiring process and stick to it. Don't simply rely on the conversational skills of yourself or your team, but incorporate standardized assessments and structured interviews. There are many assessments and interview tools available that are more consistent than the traditional interview. Also, don't underestimate the power of using your team for recruiting; this will build both retention and brand ownership.

“...limit your exposure to “know it alls” who stopped learning years ago.”

Hire for ability and attitude, not just skill set

While it is important to take direct skills into consideration, it is more important to look at the more intangible factors such as attitude and ability to work with a team. Not every applicant will match the skills you need entirely. Focusing on hiring top performers who are willing to develop their skills will broaden your pool of prospects and limit your exposure to “know it alls” who stopped learning years ago.

Run applicants through a “can do, will do” litmus test

Strong performing employees should exhibit seven key attributes. We call this the “can do/will do” litmus test. Does the applicant pass the following test?

- **Can Do:** Can this applicant do what is asked or do they have the potential to fulfill the expectations for the role?
- **Will do:** Do they have the desire to do what is necessary over the long term to be successful?
- **Good focus:** Does this applicant exhibit good focus? An employee who doesn't waver in focusing on the big picture and is more inclined to perform better, compared to someone who often gets bogged down with details.

- **Integrity:** Do you have reason to believe in the integrity of this applicant? Establishing trust and walking the talk are very important. Those who stick by their word and believe in what they do make better employees than those who do not.
- **Reliability:** Can this applicant demonstrate a track record of reliability?
- **People skills:** How would you rate this applicant's people skills? Getting along with a team is critical. Building good relationships with others translates to higher productivity.
- **Willingness to learn:** How willing is this applicant to learn new things? There's no good in hiring a smart applicant if he's not willing to be taught new skills. Instead of wasting your resources on a know-it-all, hire someone who knows the basics but is willing to learn more.

Solicit input from team-members

Put three people in a room with an applicant and the likelihood is each one will have a different take on his or her strengths, weaknesses, attitude and ability. Depending on their position in the company they will also have a different personal stake in the whole thing. Extending your interview process beyond conversations will have multiple benefits. One, it will give the applicant a chance to meet his or her peers and get a feel for the “real” work environment they will be exposed to. Two, your current staff will be able to provide insight as to whether this person will fit well on the team. Three, you will have more opportunity to fully run the applicant through the litmus test outlined above.

Part 3: Retention

Hiring good producers is only half the battle. You need to keep them motivated and happy enough to keep them from moving on to greener pastures. The old adage is that it's incrementally more expensive to find a new customer than it is to keep the ones you've got. It is not all that different when it comes to hanging on to internal talent. Turnover is expensive – both in terms of hard costs and opportunity costs. While nothing will completely eliminate turnover, the following suggestions will go a long way towards maintaining positive work environment.

Keep wages & benefits competitive

Offer a competitive benefits package that fits the needs of your employees such as health and life insurance, a retirement-savings plan, flextime, and telecommuting. This shows the employees that you recognize and care about their lives outside of the work environment.

Set measurable goals

Be clear about the “why.” Provide detailed information how these goals fit into the overall business strategy. Goals should be attainable and applicable to the success of the employee and the business as a whole. It is also imperative that the goals are relevant to their current work responsibilities.

Engage in friendly competition

Use contests and incentives to help motivate employees and make them feel rewarded. These types of programs can keep employees focused on goals and excited about their jobs.

Seek to understand—not just be understood

Imagine yourself in their shoes. A fundamental way to attract and retain young talent is to understand them. Owners and managers should recognize that these employees are used to being able to obtain information instantaneously due to their access to data through electronic sources (i.e. Google and YouTube). This means that feedback must be frequent, transparent, and show value to the employee. This will not only assist in building strong work relationships, but instilling company values as well.

Recognize that small things can make a big difference

- **Provide some small perks** such as free bagels on Wednesdays or company provided lunch during monthly meetings. It might seem insignificant to you, but employees will appreciate it and may be more likely to stay.
- **Recognize personal milestones** such as birthdays and anniversaries.
- **Draw attention to a job well done.** While rewards are an important outcome to goals achieved, it is important that they not be the main motivator for employee performance. Rewards do not need to be monetary; instead, try using feedback or appreciation for continued hard work.



Demonstrate a clear path for advancement

- **Promote from within** whenever it is possible. This gives employees a clear path of advancement and conveys that hard work and dedication does not go unrecognized.
- **Encourage employee development** through on the job training or tuition reimbursement to help further an employee's education and value to the company.

Create a Positive Work Environment

- **Look in the mirror** and ask yourself, "What kind of leader am I?" or better "Would I follow me?"
- **Make positive reinforcement a habit.** It is important to maintain focus and stay upbeat even when things are challenging.
- **Build confidence** by establishing routines, setting realistic/challenging goals, and reminding producers of past successes instead of failures.

Share the Company's Success

- **Make sure it all means something.** The sense of contributing to the overall goals and success of a company can be a tremendous motivator for producers and other agency employees. After all, no one wants to feel as if the work they do does not matter to the success of the whole. By enabling them to share in the success of the business, you ultimately enhance productivity.

Conclusion

As owners/operators of a “small business”, we at SIS understand how challenging it can be to attract, hire, retain, and motivate employees for today’s needs and tomorrow’s visions. We sincerely hope that this eGuide is beneficial to you.

Aside from providing a solid software to help agencies run better, it is our aim to provide assistance to help agencies grow and prosper. We recognize that providing the tools necessary for the success of our clients is vital to our success in turn. For more information, please feel free to contact us at **800-747-9273** or **sales@sisware.com**.

ⁱ de Jager, Jaco. "Attracting new insurance talent – can we learn from the Land Down Under?." Cover.
<http://www.cover.co.za/short-term-insurance/attracting-new-insurance-talent-can-we-learn-from-the-land-down-under>.

ⁱⁱ de Jager

About SIS

Headquartered in Columbus, Ohio, Strategic Insurance Software (SIS) is the team behind Partner XE– an innovative web-based insurance agency management system that helps independent agencies streamline workflow and grow their business. Built on a foundation of strong technology and exceptional service, we're moving forward with a constant eye on innovation that will make independent agents' lives easier.

About Partner XE

Supporting downloads from nearly 300 carriers, real time interaction, integrated agency accounting, and much more, Partner XE is a full-featured agency management system at an affordable cost for the independent insurance agency. For more information, please visit www.sisware.com

