

Johnson Associates
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Industry-Education Council of Hamilton

*HR Still Matters: Targeting Turnover in the Food Service Industry
Project Report*

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Advisory Committee and Research Team

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The research team, led by IEC Project Manager Rosalie Wilson, included Executive Director Mia Wilkinson and staff members Lynda Coleman and Yohana Otite.

The research questions were designed and analyzed by Nancy F. Johnson of Johnson Associates. Lynda Coleman conducted the face-to-face interviews.

Johnson Associates acknowledges valuable help from Eden Grodzinski on questionnaire design, and from Dr. Maureen Nummelin on research ethics. Nancy Johnson researched and wrote this report.

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A. Introduction

The role of the Industry-Education Council (IEC) of Hamilton is to bridge the gap and create avenues for cooperation between those who teach and the community that will ultimately benefit from the educational and employment success of our young people.

IEC helps Hamilton youth make the most of their potential and helps employers tap the potential of young people in the workforce.

This project responds to the special conditions in the food service industry – a sector that employs vast numbers of young people and that has come to recognize high staff turnover as a critical business problem.

In late 2010, IEC of Hamilton received support from Service Canada’s Youth Awareness Program to work with Hamilton’s restaurant sector to:

- research the nature of youth retention/turnover in Hamilton restaurants
- help identify the issues that might be contributing to high turnover, particularly among employees under the age of 26
- review best practices in employee retention here and elsewhere
- produce a handbook-style tool highlighting approaches that work, for both young employees and employers

How We Gathered Information in Hamilton

To help narrow the field and ensure that we were comparing “apples to apples,” we decided to focus on Hamilton restaurants in the middle of the hospitality spectrum: family-style, casual sit-down restaurants like Kelsey’s, Swiss Chalet, Williams Fresh Cafe, rather than either fast food outlets or gourmet dining establishments.

We then focused on the issue from two distinct perspectives: that of restaurant managers, and that of young employees in those restaurants.

The surveys were designed with a review of retention best practices in mind – to test both whether those practices were in use, whether they might improve retention if adopted, and whether there were other factors that might increase retention and/or job satisfaction and/or satisfaction with employee performance.

We analyzed the information from the surveys and interview responses and summarized it in this report, along with an overview of some key best practices in staff retention.

Responses from the managers' surveys are shown in blue; responses from young employee surveys are shown in green.¹

To see all the survey questions and responses, go to www.iechamilton.ca/xxxxxxxxxxxxxx [we could post the two complete survey reports, minus the email addresses]

Research Ethics Considerations

Because this project involved the participation of both young employees and restaurant managers, attention was paid to the standard ethical considerations related to research involving human subjects. Please see Appendix A for details.

Limitations

Although we sought direct electronic access to the restaurant employees, in several cases the questionnaires were distributed to and/or collected from employees by the participating managers. While individual questionnaires could be completed anonymously, we have some concern that some employees might have felt their responses would be seen by their employer.

Our Respondents

Employers: We recruited 25 restaurant managers, asking them to spend about 20 minutes with us in person, or online, responding to survey questions about their experience of young employees, staff turnover, their own background, and related issues in their restaurant.

What Our Surveys Tell Us About the Managers and Restaurants

Of the 25 restaurants in the survey, 41% were franchise restaurants. The others were family-owned (29%) or independent (29%). Half the 25 managers had an ownership stake in the restaurant (52%) and half did not (48%).

A majority of the restaurant managers were between the ages of 25 and 45 (64%); another 28% were age 46 to 60. They are experienced: 40% had managed a restaurant for six to ten years and a further 32% had managed a restaurant more than ten years.

Although experienced, only about half have formal education or training in food service/hospitality (24% a college diploma, 20% occasional continuing education, 8% apprenticeship training). 48% have no formal food service training.

Not only are they experienced (88% say they have done most restaurant jobs), the managers we interviewed are in it for the long haul – 68% planned to be in the

¹ Some percentages may not add to 100% because of rounding and/or respondents who skipped occasional survey questions.

restaurant industry longer than ten more years and a further 12% expected to spend at least six more years in the industry.

Employees: We asked employees in those 25 restaurants to fill out a survey about themselves and their experience of work in the restaurant sector. Our focus was employees under the age of 26. The questionnaire took about 15 minutes to complete. Eighty-eight (88) responses were received and tabulated.

What Our Surveys Tell Us About the Young Employees

All respondents were between the ages of 15 and 26. The vast majority were between 18 and 25; 19% were younger than 18.

34% were not attending school while 24% were in high school and 42% were in college, university or independent study. Although many are still in school, fewer than 10% are taking any food service or hospitality courses or co-op training.

Most (52%) are working between nine and 24 hours per week in the restaurant, while 30% work between 25 and 40 hours.

The young employees have a surprising amount of time invested in the restaurant industry. 62% have been in their current job longer than a year. Counting all their restaurant jobs, just 20% have worked less than a year in the industry; 52% have between one and five years experience, and 26% have worked longer than five years in restaurants. The majority (66%) expects to work one or two years longer at the restaurant they are in now, while 21% plan three or more years.

But while 88% report knowing about long-term careers like district manager, purchasing, front of house etc., only 6% say they definitely want a restaurant industry career; 61% say no and 33% say they don't know.

B. Staff Retention Issues and Young Employees

The issue of staff retention – keeping employees in a job after they have been recruited and trained – is a critical one for the bottom line of any enterprise. The cost of filling a job over and over again eats into the profitability of businesses in any sector. But research has shown that it is a particularly significant problem in the restaurant industry.

Staff Turnover in the Restaurant Industry

The Canadian Restaurant and Foodservice Association's research shows that "the average annual turnover rate for an hourly paid employee is 104.8% at a quick-service restaurant

and 62.5% at a casual/family dining restaurant.”² The restaurants covered in the current IEC of Hamilton study would be classified in the casual/family dining category.

While some involuntary departures (due to theft, poor performance etc.) are “healthy,” voluntary turnover is by far the most common and represents 83% of employee departures.³

What Our Surveys Tell Us About Hamilton

Turnover in these 25 Hamilton restaurants is unusually low compared to sector research.

Q: What was the staff turnover rate in your restaurant in 2010?

	<i>Under 10%</i>	<i>10% to 25%</i>	<i>26% to 39%</i>	<i>40% or more</i>
<i>Employees as a whole</i>	<i>84%</i>	<i>12%</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>4%</i>
<i>Young employees (age 25 and younger)</i>	<i>58%</i>	<i>33%</i>	<i>4%</i>	<i>4%</i>

Surprised at the turnover rate reported, we sent a follow-up email to verify each restaurant’s figures, asking them to calculate if they had estimated before. A small number of managers replied, the majority of whom confirmed the low rate they had reported initially.

Q: Is staff turnover a problem for your restaurant?

A: 96% of managers said it’s “not a problem” for staff as a whole. However concerning young employees, 54% of managers said it is a concern.

Youth in the Food Services Sector

The food service industry provides 1 out of every 5 youth jobs in Canada. Forty-three percent of food service industry employees are between the ages of 15 and 24.⁴ Twenty-two percent of Canadians report that their first job was in the restaurant industry.⁵

What Our Surveys Tell Us About Hamilton

Youth make up between one-quarter and one-half of employees in 44% of the restaurants surveyed. In a further 24% of restaurants, more than half the staff are younger than 26.

² Canadian Restaurant and Foodservice Association, Chain Compensation Survey 2009. <http://www.crfa.ca/research/>

³ Understanding Turnover & Identifying Retention Best Practices in the Food Retail/Wholesale Sector; Turnover Study; Canadian Food Industry Council, June, 2008. Cited in CFIC’s “Turning Things Around: Best Practices Guide for Employee Retention,”

⁴Canadian Restaurant and Foodservices Association (CRFA), citing Statistics Canada. <http://www.crfa.ca/research/>

⁵ CRFA, Canada’s Restaurant Industry: Putting Economic growth on the menu, Fall 2010

Costs of Staff Turnover

Estimates of the cost of turnover vary wildly. But the go2 Tourism HR Society cites research that has “shown that it can cost up to 18 months’ salary to lose and replace a manager or professional and up to six months’ salary to lose and replace an hourly worker.”⁶

The Canadian Food Industry Council has built a cost calculator for employee turnover. It identifies six quantifiable core costs:

- administration and record-keeping (the hourly wage of the person responsible for these tasks)
- the exit interview (the hourly wage of the person doing this)
- vacancy costs (costs associated with filling the position on an interim basis)
- replacement costs (advertising, screening, testing, interviewing and background checks, including the administrator’s time to undertake these functions)
- orientation, training and on-the-job coaching (wages of the new employee and the trainer)
- uniforms, footwear and other material items (provided by the employer)⁷

In addition to these hard costs, other less obvious costs include lower service quality, lost productivity, equipment damage from inexperienced users, and negative impact on the morale of employees.

To calculate the costs of turnover to your business, go to www.cfic-ccia.ca

From the Front Lines

“[Research into 220 limited-menu restaurant chains], by the international management consulting firm Sibson & Co., a Princeton, N.J.-based subsidiary of Nextera Enterprises, emphasizes that employee turnover in the fast-food segment is a voracious drain on profits, costing businesses an estimated \$3.4 billion a year. The Sibson study estimated that turnover among employees of publicly traded fast-feeder firms can be blamed for depressing their stock prices by about 38 percent.

"We believe there are several reasons for this," Sibson & Co. chairman Jude Rich wrote in an introduction. "Many managers do not know how much turnover really costs; others have not figured out the root causes, so they do not know what actions to take; while others mistakenly believe turnover is inevitable in their industry."

International Guild of Hospitality & Restaurant Managers

⁶ Cited on BCJobs.ca. <http://www.bcjobs.ca/re/hr-resources/human-resource-advice/recruitment-and-retention/employee-turnover--how-much-is-it-costing-you>

⁷ CFIC, Turning Things Around: Best Practices Guide for Employee Retention. A software version of the calculator is available at: www.cfic-ccia.ca

What Our Surveys Tell Us About Hamilton

Most managers don't rank turnover above other factors in their profitability. Turnover is much higher among young employees than among staff as a whole, and that is a concern for some managers.

Q: How important is retaining staff for the profitability of your restaurant? A: Very important: 28% Just one of many factors: 72%

*Q: Is staff turnover a problem for your restaurant?
A: 96% of managers said it's "not a problem" for staff as a whole. However concerning young employees, 54% of managers said it is a concern.*

C. Best Practices in Staff Retention and Our Survey Findings in Hamilton

The most commonly cited strategies for staff retention fall into six categories. We've gathered the strategies that best fit the restaurant sector and summarized some best practices for each. You'll also find some related findings from the IEC of Hamilton surveys of managers and young employees, along with stories and observations from the broader field.

1. Recruitment Process: getting the right candidate to start with reduces turnover later.

Suggestions include:

- make sure the wording of recruitment ads reflects your corporate culture and values, and appeals to the attributes and interests of your ideal candidate
- develop complete and detailed job descriptions – these will help candidates determine in advance whether the job is right for them
- train your interviewers

What Our Surveys Tell Us About Hamilton

Managers say that although they are successful at it, recruiting young people is not a priority.

Q: Is recruiting and hiring young people a priority for your restaurant?

A: Yes: 12% No: 84% Not sure: 4%

Q: Do you target youth in your recruiting strategies?

A: Formal system: 0% Happens informally: 20% Not something we focus on: 80%

Q: How successful are you in recruiting young people?

A: Very successful: 20% Successful: 72% Only moderately successful: 8%

From the Front Lines

Canadian Pizza Magazine reports that in Chatham Ontario, successful Little Caesars' owners Mark Demore and his brother Mike "realized a long time ago that hiring well can be the difference between running an average franchise location and a high-volume success story like theirs.

Over 21 years in the business has given the Demore brothers plenty of time to pick up a few tips along the way.

It means everything to have a good crew, Mark reiterated. And the only way to guarantee great new staff is to rely on referrals. "We only hire on referrals," he said. All [six employees interviewed] considered themselves lucky to receive the "props" from former employees and land a job with the Demores.

"It's a good team, we all get along together," said Karissa. And the management is great with hours, added Ian and Eric, who appreciate having the flexibility to work around their busy football schedule.

Demore said by establishing a good name for himself as an employer, he has made certain they will never have problems with labour shortage.

Another reason Demore is able to keep employee turnover at a minimum is because he typically only hires grade nine students. That way, Little Caesars can serve as their part-time job from junior all the way to their senior year of high school.

"They're rewarded each year with more pay and more responsibility."

And Demore, in return, has the peace of mind in knowing the restaurant is good hands when he's not there."

From "Triple Take" by Stacy Bradshaw, Canadian Pizza Magazine

2. Work environment: poor communication with supervisors, lack of engagement with the workplace team, or lack of appreciation for work completed are common reasons people leave their job. To combat turnover:

- Clearly communicate the work that needs to be done
- Recognize good work in formal and informal ways
- Give constructive feedback to employees
- Praise good work in front of peers
- Share information about the business
- Hold regular staff meetings

- Provide mechanisms for employees to identify problems
- Resolve conflicts promptly
- Ask employees for input before making changes that affect them
- Create an employee newsletter for news and to reinforce your organization's values, goals and workplace culture
- Train managers in performance coaching

What Our Surveys Tell Us About Hamilton

Generally, employees are quite satisfied with their supervisors.

Employee recognition is an area with room for improvement.

Q: How is your relationship with your immediate supervisor? He/she is:

A: Very supportive, tells me what I've done well and helps me learn: 84%

Doesn't pay much attention to what I do: 11%

Only criticizes and points out things I do wrong: 5%

Q: What would be the best kind of supervision for you in your job?

A: Co-worker who shadows me and teaches me the job: 15%

Supervisor who gives me individual feedback regularly: 43%

A team approach (everyone meets together for supervision/feedback): 42%

Q: Is there an employee recognition program?

A: Formal system: 32% Happens informally: 40% Not something we focus on: 28%

Q: I feel that management appreciates my work.

A: Definitely, yes: 55% Sort of: 34% No, not at all: 5% Don't know: 6%

From the Front Lines

“Letting your employee know the value of his or her particular job and how it fits into the smooth and successful operation lets them know why they are needed to come in every day. Identifying staff's unique skills and utilizing them gives them a sense of purpose and pride. Perhaps your prep cook can create excellent signage because he loves to paint or your driver has an alphabetized CD collection which lets you know that he would be a good candidate for organizing your stock room. Know these things about your staff because you are interested in them and allow them to shine. When they shine you shine.”

Wayne E. McKay, Canadian Pizza Magazine, Sept/Oct 2004

3. Career path: strong employees often want to learn more, increase their responsibility, and move up in the organization. If they don't see advancement, they leave. Suggestions:

- Clearly outline the path up the ladder
- If you can't promote them upwards, look laterally: are there other opportunities for growth before the next promotion is available?

- Consider subsidizing continuing education that helps employees increase their qualifications for internal promotion
- Develop mentoring programs, peer advisors
- Promote from within as much as possible

What Our Surveys Tell Us About Hamilton

Young employees are divided about whether career paths where they work are clear. Managers report it's an area they handle informally.

Q: Is there a chance to move up to a better job in the restaurant?

A: Definitely yes: 34% Sort of: 31% No, not at all: 21% Don't know: 13%

Q: Is there a clear progression up to better jobs in the restaurant?

A: Formal system: 20% Happens informally: 72% Not something we focus on: 8%

From the Front Lines

Jack in the Box's workforce management programs are an integral part of the plan to win guest loyalty. Company executives believe in a concept explained in the 1994 Harvard Business Review article "Putting the Service-Profit Chain to Work." That philosophy links the satisfaction, loyalty and productivity of frontline workers to organizational profitability.

"Key to this philosophy is developing satisfied, tenured restaurant employees who offer higher and more consistent levels of guest service," Chairman and CEO Robert Nugent told Wall Street analysts in November. "Ours is a very competitive industry. Yet among (quick-serve restaurants), we believe that we can be the employer of choice by creating a superior working environment."

Adherents of the service-profit chain believe that the cost of employee turnover isn't merely that of recruiting, hiring and training replacements. The costs of lower productivity and decreased customer satisfaction, they argue, should also be included.

To reduce turnover, Jack in the Box began offering medical, dental and vision insurance in December to full- and part-time hourly employees at company-owned Jack in the Box and JBX Grill restaurants. Jack in the Box pays a portion of the premiums for hourly employees who have at least one year of service.

"It's definitely an opportunity in the 21st century to become a good corporate citizen," says Dean Haskell, director of JMP Securities in San Francisco, who tracks Jack in the Box. "It's those things that make them be perceived as a good company."

The estimated cost of replacing an hourly employee is \$2,399, according to People Report's survey of 12,798 restaurants ranging from fine-dining to fast-food establishments. Jack in the Box estimates that it costs \$1,000 to recruit and train each

new employee. Its health care plan will pay for itself if crew turnover decreases by just one-tenth of a percent, CEO Nugent says.

Todd Henneman
Business Opportunities Journal

4. Flexibility and scheduling: the restaurant industry offers huge opportunity for flexible hours. Take advantage of that to hire those who can't work traditional hours and adapt your work processes to suit them. To reduce turnover:

- Take employee preferences into account when scheduling
- Don't overload your best employees
- Be as fair as possible in scheduling shifts
- Instead of randomly calling employees to cover nonscheduled shifts, create a more formal stand-by list of employees who are willing to cover extra shifts when your team ends up short-handed
- Plan well in advance for peak times, vacation, holidays, training times, etc.
- Address an employee's chronic absenteeism: it affects everyone

What Our Surveys Tell Us About Hamilton

Generally, employees are quite satisfied with the flexibility of their shift assignments.

Managers report a fairly strong focus on that task.

Q: Are shifts assigned fairly and with flexibility to accommodate your other commitments?

A: Definitely yes: 68% Sort of: 31% No, not at all: 1%

Q: Is there flexibility in assigning shifts?

A: Formal system: 52% Happens informally: 48%

5. Training: ongoing staff orientation, training and development is one of the most important investments you can make in staff retention. The Canadian Food Industry Council, for example, lists limited training time as one of the four most influential management practices in employee turnover. What can you do?

- Increase your focus on training
- Create individualized training plans as part of an employee's annual performance review process
- Establish a mentor system

What Our Surveys Tell Us About Hamilton

Training seems to be formalized at the beginning and less of a focus later.

Mentoring or buddy systems have room for growth.

Q: Did you receive training for the job you are doing?

A: Yes: 89% No: 11%

*Q: Those who received training rated it:
Really useful: 59% OK but not great: 37% Not very useful: 4%*

*Q: Do your employees receive training when they begin their jobs?
A: Yes, always: 100%*

*Q: Is ongoing training provided after their initial training?
A: Yes, always: 48% Sometimes: 52%*

*Q: Do you receive ongoing training?
A: Yes 51% No: 49%*

*Q: Are you ever asked to do jobs you haven't been trained for?
A: No: 61% Once in a while: 37% Frequently: 2%*

*Q: Are new staff mentored or "buddied" with a more experienced co-worker?
A: Formal system: 52% Happens informally: 44% Not something we focus on: 4%*

*Q: Do you have a mentor in the restaurant?
A: Definitely, yes: 29% Sort of: 37% No: 27% Don't know: 7%*

From the Front Lines

"An organization's human capital is one of its key sources of differentiation, and employees are more likely to remain satisfied if they receive an effective orientation and regular access to technical and non-technical training. Ongoing competency-based training and development increases employee productivity, reduces turnover, improves job satisfaction, aids in the recruiting process, rewards long-time employees, and reduces the need for employee supervision."

Canadian Food Industry Council, Breaking the Employee Turnover Cycle

From the Front Lines

In 2005, "Domino's Pizza deployed the National Restaurant Association Educational Foundation (NRAEF) Leadership & Management Program featuring Harvard ManageMentor PLUS to its current and potential managers across the organization. Following a successful pilot with senior executives, Domino's now offers this leadership course in English and Spanish as a core program for its managers at all levels, a strategy to increase Domino's employee retention rates." Dominos likes the eLearning program, which covers key management topics customized for the restaurant industry, because it is self-paced and accessible to anyone, day or night.

BusinessWire.com

6. Pay policies: while money is not the only factor for most employees, it will be an important one in their decision to stay or go. Make sure your pay policies are equitable and competitive:

- Review your pay practices regularly
- Consider all possible aspects of a pay package: base pay (hourly wage), performance-based pay (bonuses), equity-based compensation (RSP contributions, stock offerings), benefits packages (sick time, health coverage, financial planning, paid training etc.), and reward/recognition programs (like extra time off, learning opportunities, bonuses.)
- Reward good employees with a raise – even a small increase will help keep them

What Our Surveys Tell Us About Hamilton

Generally, neither employees nor managers seem focused on comparing their wages with others in the sector.

But better pay would improve retention.

Q: Is salary competitive with other similar restaurants?

A: Definitely yes: 32% Sort of: 25% No, not at all: 8% Don't know: 35%

Q: Do you compare wages with similar restaurants to stay competitive?

A: Formal system: 8% Happens informally: 29% Not something we focus on: 63%

Q: What's the #1 change that would make you stay longer in this job?

A: Better pay: 70%

Additional Observations from the Survey Results

Teamwork and Respect: 74% of young employees said they are “definitely” treated with respect and can be themselves at work. Another 24% responded “sort of” to that question. Similar numbers said they like the people they work with, either “definitely” or “sort of.” Managers identified “respect for the work and willingness to learn” as one of the strengths of young employees (76%).

“I worked hard at [this chain] since I was 14, and it wasn't until I got to this location that I was respected for my hard work, and it goes a long way!”

IEC Survey respondent

Work Ethic and Interaction with Customers: managers were split on young employees' work ethic – with 48% identifying it as an area for improvement and 44% rating it acceptable. All managers rated young employees highly on interaction with customers (8% excellent, 92% acceptable).

Turnover and Dismissal: Despite the significant turnover rate of young employees in the restaurants surveyed (estimated at under 10% by 58% of managers and at 10-25% by 33% of managers) dismissal of a young employee is relatively rare. Close to half of managers report they “hardly ever” have to dismiss a young employee. Another 40% say

they do it “about twice a year” while the remaining 12% report doing it more frequently than that. About half (48%) report they have a formal system for dealing with problems before dismissal, while 36% report an informal process and 16% say they have no process. When asked about additional things they do with young employees before dismissing them, 52% said they did go an extra step with strategies ranging from informal talk to coaching, performance evaluations, written warnings, and retraining. The employees themselves report that they leave most often to go back to school or continue career training (32%) or move on to a better job (26%) – but 33% have no plans to leave.

“Young employees need to learn that attitude makes a huge difference in their quest for better jobs.”

IEC Survey respondent

Exit interviews: many businesses rely on exit interviews to understand the reasons employees leave. They can then work to improve the conditions that are within their control that are contributing to high turnover. In our survey, no managers reported a formal exit interview system. 8% said it happens informally and 92% said it’s not something they focus on.

Appearance: Almost all responding employees (94%) wear uniforms for their job, but 27% also said they had to change their usual appearance (cut their hair, remove piercings, cover up tattoos etc) for their job. 76% of employers report that appearance (hair, neatness, visible piercings or tattoos) is “very important” when hiring a young employee; 24% say it’s “just one factor among many others.”

Cell phones: In previous studies, employers reported cell phone use as a source of conflict with their young employees. We asked our managers whether inappropriate cell phone use (texting or checking email while on shift for example) is an issue: 80% said it’s a very important issue, while 20% said it’s just one factor among others.

The best and worst of the job: we asked young employees to tell us the best thing about their job, the worst thing, and the most surprising thing. In the “best thing” category, answers clustered around the nature of the team, the atmosphere, their co-workers and the fun they have with the group. Second place went to comments about the hours and the money. The “worst thing” comments clustered around cleaning duties and grease, nasty customers, and shifts/hours. “Most surprising” things grouped around how fast-paced and busy the job is, and the breadth of human interactions – both positive and negative.

What would make you stay? We asked young employees to rate 3 things that would make them stay longer in their job, out of a selection of 9. Top rating (as expected) went to “better pay” followed by “more flexible shifts” and “chance to move up.” “More training/learning opportunities” and “better supervisor” were the next most-frequently chosen options.

From the Front Lines

“Working to cut turnover isn't just an effort to keep low-paid employees happy, [talent managers Sibson & Company] says. The costs are immense. Consider this:

*To recoup the cost of losing just one crew member, a fast food restaurant must sell 7,613 children's combo meals at \$2.50 each.

* A typical information technology company incurs a cost of \$34,100 for each lost worker.

* To recoup the cost of losing just one sales clerk, a clothing store must sell almost 3,000 pairs of khakis at \$35.”

Evan Cooper, MoreBusiness.com

D. Previous Research: Views of Hamilton Youth and Employers About Work and Young Workers

In March 2009 and March 2010, the Hamilton Training Advisory Board (HTAB) published research reports on youth and work. The first, “Dreams and Expectations,” reported on conversations the researchers held with youth aged 16-25 about work and career.⁸ The second, “Realities and Possibilities,” responded with employer experiences and thoughts about the employment of youth.⁹

A diverse group of 50 Hamilton youth were involved in the first study, through focus groups. In the second study, 242 employers were surveyed. Just 2% of participating employers were from the hospitality/tourism sector (manufacturing, wholesale/retail trade, health/social services, and construction were the most-represented sectors). Nevertheless, the results are informative and helped to shape the questions we posed in our surveys.

Some of the HTAB findings of interest in the current context:

- Youth in this group (known as Generation Y) typically grew up with the internet, tend to have been over-managed by their parents (schedules, activities), have high expectations (sometimes seen as an attitude of entitlement), are socially-conscious, and they multi-task

⁸ Hamilton Training Advisory Board “Dreams and Expectations: A Report on Conversations with Hamilton Youth on Work and Careers,” March 2009. Available online at www.htab.com

⁹ Hamilton Training Advisory Board “Realities and Possibilities: A Report on Employer Experiences and Thoughts About the Employment of Youth,” March 2010. Available online at www.htab.com

- The top five things youth are looking for in employment: salary, benefits, flexible schedule, opportunities to work on their own, respect from co-workers. In addition, they want work that “resonates with their interests and passions; uses skills they have; allows them to have a positive impact; does not require them to do unpleasant work; pays well, and; is not boring or routinized and allows creativity.”¹⁰
- Their most frequent reasons for leaving or staying in a job: respect and quality of working relationships
- 54% of employers said they were successful or very successful at retaining youth
- Many employers find recruitment, dismissal and retention of youth more challenging than for employees in general
- employers were asked to rate youth skills/attributes. They rated highest: willingness to learn, adaptability, attitude, technical skills. They rated lowest: commitment, ability to work independently, interview skills, likelihood of staying in the job, written communication
- frequently cited challenges of working with youth: work habits (lateness, absences, inappropriate use of cell phones), attitude (for example attitude of ‘entitlement’), lack of experience, inappropriate dress or presentation
- the top contributions employers felt youth can make to the workplace: energy and enthusiasm, new ideas/perspectives/creativity, technical skills

The HTAB reports recommended a number of strategies to bridge the gap between employer and youth, including changes to high school approaches to career planning, increased use of mentoring in the workplace, changes to employee recruitment practices, increased dialogue between youth and employers, and further research on best practices.

¹⁰ *ibid*, page i-ii

Appendix A: Ethical Considerations Addressed

Because this project involved the participation of both young employees and restaurant managers, attention was paid to the standard ethical considerations related to research involving human subjects.

1. Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent

All participation was voluntary and potential participants had the clear right to refuse to participate.

Participants in the manager interviews were individually recruited to the project by the research team. They were first telephoned and invited to participate, after the project was briefly described. If they agreed to participate, a convenient time was set for a face-to-face interview (14 cases). Those managers formally indicated their consent by signing the completed interview questionnaire. Nineteen managers chose to complete the survey online and checked a consent box on the survey.

The restaurants where managers agreed to participate formed the pool from which employees were invited to participate.

Each manager was asked how many employees he/she had under age 26. The appropriate number of questionnaires was left, along with the direct URL address for completing the survey online. Participating managers were asked to give both options to their employees. Two weeks later, the interviewer returned to the restaurants to collect the completed employee surveys. In some cases, an additional visit was required to obtain all the surveys. In all, of the 88 employees who responded, xxx did so directly on SurveyMonkey and the remainder completed hard-copy questionnaires. Those responses were inputted to the SurveyMonkey site by IEC and aggregated with the other responses for analysis.

In all cases, employees indicated their consent by checking a box on the survey.

A Note about Age of Majority: We anticipated that a number of the potential employee respondents would be under the age of 18. There are two schools of thought in the research ethics field with regard to age and informed consent for research. One school of thought argues that participants under age 18 should have parental consent because they are minors under the law and therefore vulnerable. The other school of thought argues that age in itself does not make a participant vulnerable, particularly if the research questions are minimal risk, and that requiring young people to obtain additional consent is discriminatory and would exclude many of them from participating.

Because the participants in this survey are legally working and are being surveyed about that work with minimal risk questions, we chose to treat their express consent as sufficient, even if they were under the age of 18.

2. Privacy and Confidentiality

The employee surveys were anonymous, unless participants chose to be eligible for a prize draw. In that case, the only identifying information was their email address, which they filled in at the end of the survey.

The manager interviews included contact information for follow-up. These surveys, and all research data, were treated confidentially by the research team.

In all cases, only aggregate information is reported in the research findings. No specific participants and no specific restaurants are identified with specific findings.

3. Equity, Potential Harm and Vulnerable Populations

There were no exclusions of potential participants once the population of restaurants was established. However, the youth employee survey was targeted at employees under the age of 26 and participants over 25 were excluded. There were no other restrictions or exclusions.

No vulnerable populations were part of the research study.

During the research design phase, the research team assessed the potential harms that might arise from the research and concluded that the only potential harm would be negative impact on the work environment if critical comments could be attributed to particular restaurants or to particular employees. We assured ourselves that the research design precluded this, and appropriate confidentiality and privacy measures were in place to guard against that harm.

Limitations: although our research plan assumed direct electronic access to the restaurant employees, in several cases the questionnaires were distributed to and/or collected from employees by the participating managers. While individual questionnaires could be completed anonymously, and could be completed online directly with SurveyMonkey, we have some concern that respondent confidentiality was not as complete as we had planned because some managers collected hard-copy questionnaires. Some employees, feeling their answers might be seen by their employer, may have responded accordingly.

4. Report of Findings to Participants

The report of this research will be shared with the participating restaurants and posted on the IEC website. It will also be sent directly to participants who provided their email address.