

The right stuff

North Side Foods faced the positive challenge of a growing workforce by using innovative recruiting and training practices.

BY ANDY HANACEK, EXECUTIVE EDITOR

When North Side Foods Corp. committed to an aggressive five-year strategic growth plan, it became clear that the employee base would have to grow in size and ability for the processor to reach its goals. For that, the company's human-resources department could have decided to stick to more traditional methods of recruitment, training and retention.

Instead, North Side Foods embarked upon a highly involved and intuitive pathway toward recruiting, developing and retaining its employees, all with a close eye on bringing in the right people to carry the organization forward.

"To get to our 'Future Picture' of 2012, we were going to have to recruit a lot of people, initiate or upgrade a lot of processes, and it was going to take additional staff to do that," says Colleen McConnaughey, assistant vice president, human resources. Anchored by the company's strategic plan, the HR department created a plan to develop and grow the employee base.

Applicants for jobs are put through a rigorous screening and interviewing process that identifies the best matches and the skills sets that each interviewee possesses. The interviews, some of which are carried out by a variety of tenured non-HR employees, also are designed to give candidates a picture of the landscape as a new North Side Foods employee.

North Side partners with a local industrial psychologist, Dr. Rex Gatto, to then administer two assessments to finalists: the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (personality assessment) and an Emotional Intelligence assessment.



From left to right: Rebekah Smith, Scott DeMarco, Andy Hanacek (*The National Provisioner*), Kristin Bartone (Ameritas Group), Denise Rosenberger, Colleen McConnaughey and Carly Gamarro.

"Emotional Intelligence emphasizes intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships," McConnaughey says. These tests are not used to rule out finalists, but instead to properly match finalists with positions that might fit their strengths and to give managers a better understanding of how to interact with their new employee, and vice versa.

On the training side, North Side offers communications training to its employees via Gatto, as well as the Dale Carnegie Leadership Training for Managers course on-site for all salaried employees.

"As a group, we have started to change the culture that has been at North Side Foods a long time," explains Denise Rosenberger, manager of human resources and labor relations. "People are starting to see that the tools we've used are useful and there are great results coming from them."

Rebekah Smith, training and

development coordinator, has noticed the change as well, and says participation in training sessions has been excellent.

"A lot of people can have negative attitudes toward training, that they have to sit through another class or seminar," she explains. "But now, I have people coming to me and asking for more training or ideas, and that's been a real eye opener."

Overall, North Side Foods has found a way to grow its employee base and improve their skill sets and job satisfaction, all while keeping the entire workforce pushing to reach the same strategic goals. As of August 2008, McConnaughey says, North Side Foods had increased the corporate salaried staff at the Arnold, Pa., facility by 30 positions over the previous year, and at the company's Cumming, Ga., facility, the hourly workforce increased by approximately 30 employees. **NP**