



## STAFFING SOLUTIONS

TACKLING EMS WORKFORCE CHALLENGES

# RECRUIT & RETAIN 'GENERATION Y' EMPLOYEES

One of the best-attended sessions at the American Ambulance Association's annual conference in Las Vegas in early December featured a panel on how to recruit, select, hire and retain a new generation of EMS employees.

Today's EMS chiefs, executives and managers are part of the "Baby Boomer" generation, born 1946-1964, or "Generation X," born between 1965 and 1977. But today's new recruits were born after 1978 and are part of "Generation Y," which has a very different culture, creating new challenges for ambulance services.

Steve Athey, a long-time ambulance-company executive who now owns the Texas-based consulting firm Health Care Visions, noted that members of Generation Y are "the children of baby boomers, and the first generation born since the computer age." As such, he said, they are technology dependant and expect instant information. They also tend to be smart, demanding risk takers.

Panelist Greg Lawton, another long-time EMS executive, who is now president of Avesta Corp., which provides human resources support for medical transportation services, noted that the strategies used to recruit baby boomer and Generation X employees won't work for Generation Y.

To attract Generations Y employees, he said, "A brand for your organization is as important as anything else. They don't job seek in the newspaper or even on Monster.com. But they do come to your Web site for information. They shop for jobs online." Looking outside EMS, he notes that approximately 45% of online job applications come "after hours, with the most applications made between on Mondays and Friday between 4 p.m. and 3 a.m."

Lawton advises ambulance services to revamp their Web sites to include realistic organizational previews and customized career and job boards. "Tell people what they need to know about your organization up front," he said.

The biggest key to employee retention, he said, is to hire the right people in the first place. To that end, Avesta also uses an automated, Web-based system to attract qualified candidates and online assessments to screen out those unlikely to succeed as employees.

"Give them realistic expectations and screen them for competencies," he advised. "Become selective, and then look at your leadership team; poor leadership will scare away about 30% of your workforce. And make sure your pay is competitive."

Panelist Denny Platt, president of LifeStar Response, a medical transportation company that operates in six states, said, "We created an online application and testing to cycle out short-termers, so we now keep most people longer. If you *must* hire questionable people, spend more time with them up front." He said his company kept losing EMTs to the fire service until it began hiring "different kinds of people, for example, single mothers."

When an audience member asked how to deal with the needs of single parents while being fair to other employees, panelist Jim O'Connor, senior vice president of TransCare Corp., which provides ambulance service New York, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Maryland, advised stressing the 24/7 requirements of the job during new-employee orientation. He added that TransCare ensures employees know which days they may be held for overtime by assigning everyone an A or a B. "On A days, you might get held over if you're an A, and B people might get held over on a B day," he explained.

O'Connor also advised, "Get rid of your malcontents even if you must pay more overtime."

The audience participated in a lively discussion about the challenges of managing Generation Y employees. "We have many young folks who seem to want a parent figure at work," one audience member said.

"Many youth today need help with decision making," Athey said, noting that a recent survey found 34% of 18-34-year-olds still get money from their parents and a significant number still live at home.

When he asked, "How many of you have had a parent call after an employee reprimand?" many hands went up. "Some companies invite parents to open houses and even to company meetings," Athey said.

Several people mentioned having issues with employees who wanted to wear golf shirts instead of "class-A uniforms."

According to Athey, this is such a huge issue for Generation Y employees that EMS employers may need to allow more casual attire—although surveys have found that the public and other health-care providers prefer to see EMTs in Class-A uniforms.

"This generation expects to be listened to at work; if not, they're not engaged," Lawton said. ■

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