



2024 Best Practices Submission

Presentation Title:

The Talent Pipeline: How USM Is Prioritizing the Employee Experience

Presenters:

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Presentation Description:

In today's challenging labor market, institutions have been grappling with unfilled positions, soaring turnover rates, and a growing talent deficit. This presentation delves into a 10-year case study of one state's public sector employees, revealing how retirements are a shrinking percentage of overall resignations. Additionally, we explore the CPA Pipeline, a talent shortage identified by the AICPA and NASBA for accountants, and the strategies they employ to address it. Finally, we will examine the profound impact of the 'Great Resignation' on higher education institutions and how the University of Southern Mississippi used its "Southern Miss Employee Advantage" as a strategic approach of talent optimization to tackle turnover and recruitment challenges resulting in a Forbes designation as a "Best in State" employer. Join us as we unravel the complexities of the current labor market landscape and discover innovative solutions to these pressing issues.

Statement of the Problem:

The University of Southern Mississippi experienced the "Great Resignation" as most institutions did. Overall turnover increased significantly, while our applicant pools shrank. Overall morale became affected by the turmoil of turnover and unfilled vacancies.

Identify the Solution:

We recognized that we were lacking an Employer Value Proposition- what is it about USM that makes us a place someone would want to work? We held focus groups with various segments of employees including staff, faculty and leaders to gain insight into why our employees came to work here and why they stay. This resulted in our Southern Miss Employee Advantage (SMEA), which we now can use in our recruitment process to better understand what type of applicant would be most interested in us and how to sell ourselves to them. Human Resources also held open sessions with leaders on the importance of culture in recruitment and retention and sharing best practices. Our financial outlay was minimal.

Implementation Timeline:

The total timeline for implementation was approximately 6 months. In January, we held the focus groups. The SMEA was established by March. Communication of the SMEA occurred in April and in May a contest was held for employees to create a SMEA statement. "Managing Through the Great Resignation" open sessions were held in May and June. Our SMEA website was up and in use by June.

Benefits & Retrospect:

The creation of an EVP allowed the institution to be reminded of why we all love USM and are loyal. The SMEA created an excitement again about who we are as an institution and provided departments a recruitment tool they didn't have previously (how to answer the question "Why would I want to work for you?"). The open sessions then allowed for the opportunity for leadership to regain focus on the importance of culture, which was getting lost in the panic of turnover. We recommitted to proper hiring practices and performance management processes to not only not compound the problem of turnover but to reverse it. Since, our turnover and applicant pools have returned to pre-pandemic levels. In 2023, USM was ranked on the Forbes Best in State Employers list.