

WORKPLACE ISSUES

Human resources primer offered by island expert

Larry Shetzer gives tips at library presentation

A human resources expert is providing a free talk with tips for employers at the Salt Spring Public Library next week.

Larry Shetzer is a Salt Spring resident who has a PhD in industrial/organizational psychology and industrial engineering and has been a human resources consultant for more than 20 years. He will present his talk, with a focus on island-based small business operations, on Thursday, March 8 at 7 p.m.

Human resources or the "people" side of the business is not normally the first priority for entrepreneurs, says Shetzer.

"HR is often managed by the 'seat of the pants' with the belief that it is just common sense, and those attitudes can be detrimental to success," he said. "But

with a little planning and knowledge you can have the best workforce possible while anticipating problems before they happen."

Shetzer offers the following small business HR tips in advance of his presentation.

- A good place to start is with an HR handbook with resources on the major HR functions and issues, including recruitment/selection, training, sexual harassment policy, compensation, substance screening, performance feedback and employee termination.

- Island employers must deal with a restricted labour force. Consider multiple recruitment sources and remember that geographical restriction can be an advantage (e.g., potentially excellent employees who could work off island but don't want to travel).

- When using job interviews for selec-

tion, devise a systematic procedure based on objective job behaviours and requirements. Consider selection tools beside the traditional job interview, e.g., work sample or job knowledge tests, biographical tests (leadership, teamwork skills), integrity/honesty tests and substance abuse screening. These can be cost effective and greatly improve the chances of choosing the best and screening out potential problems.

- Employers across North America are facing a sea change in attitudes towards workplace sexual harassment. Entrepreneurs must be ahead of the curve on this issue with a sexual harassment policy to avoid a poisoned work environment and costly legal or human rights claims.

Employee training should be planned and systematic, and performance feedback should be constructive while documenting deficiencies.

The entrepreneur should be aware of the range of pay systems that can maximize productivity, such as merit-based pay and incentives.

Finally, succession planning deserves attention and, if it is necessary to terminate an employee, there are procedures as to the best way to proceed.

According to Shetzer's website, he spent eight years with the behavioural sciences group at Bell Canada in Montreal, working primarily in developing employee selection and performance management tools.

"At Virginia Tech he did a year internship at the Virginia Productivity Center, implementing quality improvement programs at a local textile plant. He has taught upper level HR managers in China during several visits to that country with the United Nations International Trade Commission."