

Kip Rodda
Manager, Internal Control & Revenue
Seattle Municipal Court
600 Third Avenue, Room 1207
Seattle, WA 98104-1852

IMPROVING RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION AT THE MUNICIPAL COURT OF SEATTLE: CREATING A TWO-YEAR PLAN

This project reviews the recruitment and retention problems at The Municipal Court of Seattle (SMC). While the problems are courtwide they are more readily apparent in the areas of the court experiencing a high turnover. These include court services and customer services, which include courtroom staff and phone and counter staff respectively. With the changing role of the court in the community and greater expectations of the court's constituency, the court needs to recruit top individuals and retain them to pursue new initiatives such as mental health court, community court, and online services. With a courtwide vacancy rate near 15% for most of the year turnover, recruitment, and training costs are using court resources needed for new initiatives and lowering the morale of remaining staff.

The goal of the project is the creation of a two-year plan to improve recruitment and retention at the court. The plan will be based on a review of relevant literature, a survey of court employees, and a review of exit interviews on employees who have left the court. This research project seeks answers to the following questions:

- ?? What is the court doing right and wrong for its employees?
- ?? Why are employees leaving the court?
- ?? Why are some candidates declining job offers after going the recruitment process?
- ?? Are any of the successful recruitment and retention practices in the private sector or other public sector agencies applicable to the court?

A survey of permanent court employees was conducted in September and October of 2000. The survey group consisted of two hundred and fifty-three employees of SMC working in three buildings in downtown Seattle. The survey consisted of fifteen questions covering why did they accept a position with the court, why they are staying at the court, what they like least and most, and what they would change if they could. The survey also asked if they were planning on leaving in the next twelve months, and what, if anything could be done to change their mind. Additional questions asked about interaction with supervisors and training. They were also asked to indicate the area of the court where they worked, age group, and length of employment with the court. The survey questions were based in part on what was learned in the literature review which was underway prior to the survey. The surveys were returned to the researcher who entered the data into a database.

Other sources utilized by the researcher included exit interviews and summaries of comments from employee focus groups. SMC Human Resources had implemented an improved exit interview form in March of 2000. There were seventeen available for review in October of 2000 and the researcher reviewed the comments made by those leaving. During October of 2000, 10% of the employees from each court division were asked to participate in one of three focus groups discussing how employees view the Court's current programs regarding employee motivation and job satisfaction. One additional source presented itself in December of 2000 when a new manager was hired. At the request of the researcher the manager related her view of the court's interview and recruitment process.

One hundred and nineteen responses to the survey were received. This represents a response rate of 47%. The findings highlighted several areas that the court staff felt needed improvement. Most were areas that are common to other government agencies and the private

sector. The researcher feels the project was definitely worthwhile and will provide a benchmark for employee satisfaction in the future. Additionally, the research showed that some of the measures the court has recently undertaken are in the areas most needing attention.

The researcher's recommendations provide several ideas that can be implemented, and highlight other areas for short and long-term improvement. The most consistent theme to the researcher was the management and leadership problems either real or perceived by the staff. This was the most frequent answer to what was liked least and what they would change if they could. Responses to this question are also tied to communication problems mentioned by respondents. The court instituted an extensive training program for supervisors, managers, and directors during the second half of 2000. This will need follow-up to ensure that the skills passed along are used. Creating a training plan for each employee will answer other staff concerns. There are also several other recommendations the researcher feels should be implemented. Moving ahead with the compensation review the court is planning and which the City of Seattle supports is important to all employees. Compensation reviews and budget changes take time but some changes can be implemented immediately to make a difference. The court needs to re-recruit existing employees. SMC needs to let them know their contribution is valued. Improve recognition and reward of staff. Everyone appreciates a compliment. The court should try re-orientating existing staff. By sending a few current staff through orientation with each group of new hires several benefits can be accomplished. They can participate in the orientation by explaining their areas to the group. Improved communication can result from their learning about changes in other areas of the court. The new hires will have more contact with existing staff to help their transition to the court.

This [research paper](#) is available in its entirety in portable document format. To access, you must first obtain and install the Adobe Acrobat Reader.



To borrow a copy of this research paper, please contact:

Knowledge Information Services
National Center for State Courts
300 Newport Avenue
Williamsburg, VA 23185
Phone: (800) 616-6164

Visit the Institute for Court Management Web site at:
www.ncsconline.org/d_icm/icmindex.html