

Staffing for a Brave New World

Speakers:

Dawn McCoy

Science

Washington, DC

Leslie Cameron

American Psychological Association

Washington, DC

Shelley Potler

Williams & Wilkins

Baltimore, Maryland

Reporter:

Laura King

American Medical Association

Chicago, Illinois

In *Brave New World*, Aldous Huxley describes a Utopia that breeds, clones, and conditions people for specific jobs. In today's world, many managers are nearly desperate enough to consider Huxley's ideas. Who could pass up hiring a born copyeditor? Who wouldn't be tempted by the thought of cloning that perfect proofreader? And if training doesn't work, why not condition the ultimate editor? Of course, Huxley shows that drastic measures yield deadly results. But how do we solve staffing problems in this brave new world of outsourcing, downsizing, and reengineering? Three editorial managers discussed the issue at the recent CBE meeting.

Shelley Potler discussed recruiting and

hiring. Potler detailed what she looks for when hiring: background, salary requirements, and previous editing experience. She recommended using the application form as a screening tool by asking the following questions: Is the form completely filled out? Are there any unexplained time gaps? Is there employment stability and a progression in salary and job level? She cited messy forms and misspellings as red flags to the hirer. She warned that hiring at a lower salary could create employee dissatisfaction; however, the downsizing of the job market should be considered.

Potler also detailed what to look for on an applicant's resume. She cautioned against resumes containing trivial data and qualify-

ing statements, such as “assisted with” and “responsible for”, which sound impressive but mean nothing. She warned against hiring writers over editors, emphasizing that the skills are disparate. Potler concluded that closely screened applicants are easier to train and retain.

Leslie Cameron concurred with Potler on the importance of screening. Cameron discussed the interview as the most telling part of the hiring process, particularly when companies prohibit applicant testing. She recommended second interviews with second interviewers and described the process as a chance for candidates to reveal themselves. She advised interviewers to follow their instincts. Her advice was, “Don’t settle.”

One of Cameron’s main concerns was how to keep the good person. She offered several recommendations:

Reward employees with small tokens, such as baseball tickets, mugs, and pencils;

decorate for birthdays; and write thank-you notes.

- Support employee-assistance programs, which help employees with personal problems.
- Form working groups with nonmanagerial members to address problems.
- Encourage professional development.
- Terminate poor performers because they create a negative atmosphere.
- Accommodate people’s personal lives.

Dawn McCoy was also concerned with retention but added that turnover can often be healthy. When an employee is promoted within the company, it shows that advancement is possible. Promoted editorial staffers take their skills to other departments, often making work easier for editors. Turnover also provides an opportunity to rethink department structures, thereby streamlining work flow.

McCoy, like Potler and Cameron, emphasized the importance of hiring the right person for the job, saying, “Hold out for the best candidate you can find.” She recommended preventive hiring, which she defined as hiring the overqualified if they have skills that you might use later. With current staff, she suggested identifying those who are not afraid of change and reassuring those who are.

Today’s brave new world of publishing is not as dire as the world that Huxley created, but it is fraught with contemporary problems regarding staffing. Short of breeding, cloning, and conditioning, how do we hire and retain the right employee? According to Potler, Cameron, and McCoy, the savvy manager hires smart, trains thoroughly, and rewards often. And as McCoy said, “Be one step ahead of the game, even when you don’t know what the game is.” 