

MORE THAN A WORKPLACE

Attracting – and Appreciating – Individuals

By Symone C. Skrzycki

Whatever a company’s industry, size, location or mission, people are at its core. BizVoice® spoke with leaders at various organizations regarding how they recruit, retain and support their greatest assets.

Participants include:

- Doug Pettitt – president, United Companies Air Center (one of the four operating units that fall under the United Companies umbrella), and chief people officer, United Companies (headquarters: Evansville)
- Kim Ringham – vice president of people operations, Foamcraft (polyurethane foam fabricator; headquarters: Indianapolis)
- Dayna Nicholas – director of talent management, Land O’Frost (producer of products such as lunch meats and snacks; headquarters: Munster)

BizVoice: What strategies help you find the right talent?

Pettitt: “It’s important to note that we always (first) try to find an internal candidate to fill open roles and we put a lot of emphasis on two-way communication with our employees. They all have multiple feedback opportunities with their supervisor, including a formal career discussion every year at least once where they’re asked various questions about first – their satisfaction with their current role – but then, ‘Where do you want to be in the next couple of years and even longer

term?’ When they identify something, we put a development plan together to determine how to fill any gaps. That also helps us with succession planning.”

Ringham: “Ensuring we’re finding somebody that’s aligned with our values is really important to us. We invest heavily in developing our talent internally. We empower our local leaders at each of the five plants (Indianapolis, Elkhart, Goshen, Greenfield and Mitchell) in the hiring process and in the interview process. And we’re very honest about the work. Manufacturing can be demanding, but it’s really rewarding for people that enjoy teamwork and building something real together.”

Nicholas: “We’re seeking talent that reflects the communities we serve and want to foster an environment where every employee feels safe, valued and heard. Over 60% of our promotions are internal promotions. We’re very proud of that. And of course, if we’re continuously promoting people, you have to bring in new talent. (As) we look at the younger generations in our society, we want to attract and grow them. One way we attract talent is through internships. They’re invigorating to work with. In addition to that, we have a management trainee program for college graduates.”

BV: What initiatives support mental health – and other aspects of wellness – in your workplace?



Pettitt: “We offer an employee assistance program, which allows folks to access external mental health professionals. With physical health, we focus on quality health insurance provisions for our employees. We offer biometric tests (for instance), which give them critical baseline information for their health feedback. We financially reward them for doing that.

“We also think people need to take time away from work and have a pretty competitive PTO plan.”

Ringham: “We start with strong foundational benefits such as medical coverage and employee assistance – tools they can use to support medical and mental health (as well as) family needs.

“But just as important are the day-to-day experiences employees have with their leaders. Making sure we have an environment that’s supportive for somebody’s mental health: clear communication, fair treatment, supervisors who employees can talk to. All of those things can have an impact on reducing stress and creating a sense of stability when – in some of our team members’ lives – work may be the most stable place they have.”

Nicholas: “We have employee assistance programs provided at no cost. What we’ve seen is people appreciate that opportunity to anonymously use those programs and not feel like Land O’Frost is in their personal business.

“Every one of our locations has gym availability with discounted membership. At

Developing talent is crucial at Foamcraft as well as hiring people aligned with its values (left). Land O’Frost blends baseball and fundraising while partnering with the Northwest Indiana Oilmen (middle). United Leasing and Finance’s quality improvement teams take part in Fun Day exercises.



some of the locations, we have employee-led initiatives where groups of people do a workout session together or play pickleball.

“In addition to that, we focus on building a culture where employees feel supported. They’re encouraged to use resources so they don’t feel like they have to navigate life’s challenges on their own.”

BV: How do you balance productivity/ work quality and providing an enjoyable environment?

Pettitt: “There’s no one recipe ... but you can’t overstate the importance of communication and engagement with your employees. The employee engagement team sponsors a number of events throughout the year. A coffee truck (for instance) will show up. We have a year-long competition based on the business units where activities include things like a golf outing or a bowling or pickleball tournament. Folks get engaged and participate after hours or on weekends.

“In addition), we have a targeted focus on continuous improvement. That’s part of our DNA. So, we incentivize folks to come up with process improvement ideas. Everyone can make a positive impact on the business.”

Ringham: “We’ve found that a positive and engaging work environment actually helps performance rather than competing with it. If you feel respected, if you feel like you belong and if you feel like it’s a pleasant place to be, you’re naturally going to take

more pride in your work and in the output you’re producing because you’re invested.

“Our local employee engagement committees meet monthly with team members who represent the makeup of their plant. That group of people is organizing seasonal activities, doing recognition efforts and stringing together small moments that make work more enjoyable. We believe engagement grows when we focus on kind of a three-fold strategy of caring for our people, communicating with our people and developing our people.”

Nicholas: “Primarily what we focus on is creating an environment where employees feel valued and supported – whether it’s helping each other out on the production floor or recognizing achievements. That starts with setting clear expectations, teamwork and developing accountability. That’s where our values come into place.

“On top of that, we like to have fun! Every location has different things that speak to their particular group of people. We have a chairman’s award (for instance) where we can recognize employees that exemplify our values and purpose. We celebrate them with a special dinner and charitable donations on their behalf.

“What I’ve found at Land O’Frost is that you can take the initiative to get involved and learn as much as you can about the business and be appreciated for that. You’re not held back from expanding your knowledge.” ■

