

# Recruiting & Retaining Staff the Hytek Way

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## ■ Introduction

I was introduced to the swine industry 18 years ago and have worked in barns, managed barns, and since 2000, I have been Manager of Human Resources for Hytek. Currently I am responsible for 500+ Hytek employees working in transportation, barns, offices, and feed mills. I am able to speak to you about recruiting and retaining staff as someone who has been an employee, a manager and an employer. This is important because a role in HR requires being able to balance the employees needs with the best interests of the company. I am confident when I hire a successful candidate that not only will they enhance our team but also that I am offering them a position with a company that I believe in and in an industry I am proud to be a part of.

## ■ Recruiting Obstacles

- Potential employees haven't heard about you
- Positions in the swine industry are misunderstood
- Experienced employees are already working for "the other guy"
- Employees are leaving the area to work in stronger markets
- There is a shortage of workers

## ■ Hytek's Recruiting Solutions

We use every media outlet available to ensure potential employees know about our company. We have exhibits at job fairs and career symposiums and we advertise online, on radio, in newspapers and trade periodicals. Our aim is

to have big bright booths and advertisements in order to grab the attention of career seekers.

A common misconception is that one is required to have agricultural experience or education in order to obtain a career in the swine industry and that once hired you will work in a barn with the animals. We educate potential employees to the wide variety of positions available by offering detailed descriptions of the careers for which we are hiring. We make it clear that good people with education, experience, or just a keen interest in sales, business, accounting, computers, maintenance, highway tractor driving, as well as agriculture and farming can have an exciting and rewarding career with Hytek.

While recruiting we ask ourselves “what sets us apart from those other guys” and we highlight these qualities whenever we promote a career with Hytek. Word of mouth is a great resource for obtaining new hires and for this we nurture an environment where our employees are content. We want them to believe in us and tell their friends and family and colleagues that working for Hytek is a positive experience. To ensure happy staff, we say what we do and do what we say. In 2007, we developed a set of our vision, values and mission statements, which we now post at every site (**Figure 1**). With the majority of staff agreeing, we are working towards the same vision and living out our values daily; we have made a positive name for ourselves. This good name has produced an abundance of men and women from all over the world eager to join the Hytek team.



Figure 1. Hytek’s Vision, Values and Mission Statement

Hytek has implemented a foreign recruitment program to tap into the foreign job market. In Manitoba, we use the MB Employer Direct PNP stream. This allows for pre-approval, the employee is able to bring their family and we gain workers with a level of skill that is valuable. (**Figure 2**)



**Figure 2. Hytek's recruitment display**

## ■ The Interview & Negotiations

You really only get one chance to make a first impression and during an interview everyone is trying to make a good one. It is important to go into an interview with an optimistic attitude, a clear idea of the position for which you are hiring, knowledge of the company, and what you are prepared to offer on behalf of the company. If we are hiring for a position that can be better explained by the manager of the department, I will ask that manager to either conduct the interview or join me during the interview. If you are manager of HR or a manager in another department you are representing your company; be honest and upfront and do not promise what you can't deliver. When potential employees are not beating down your door and you have a good candidate sitting in front of you, avoid the temptation to offer the world. If you have competitive wages and excellent benefits there is no need to exaggerate the positives in order to convince someone to accept a position with your company.

Hytek offers, whenever possible, the opportunity to "test drive" the job. We welcome the employee to spend a day at the position they are considering. Our goal is to demonstrate what a positive experience it is to be a part of the Hytek team and to sign a mutually beneficial contract at the end of the day. It

gives them confidence that they are accepting a career they can excel at. If the experience proves the position and the candidate not to be a good fit, we shake hands and wish them well.

We are proud of our employees and support a team atmosphere. We post the photographs of every employee and we highlight our “wall of fame” during the interview process (**Figure 3**). This appeals to any potential new hires with the desire to join a team where they can be more than just an employee number.



**Figure 3. HYTEK's "Wall of Fame"**

### ■ **Obstacles to Retaining Employees– Reasons Good Employees Quit**

- The job is not as expected
- Lack of autonomy and respect
- Feeling undervalued
- Unclear performance goals
- Management lacks interpersonal skills
- No chance for advancement
- Below average pay and/or benefits

## ■ Hytek's Solutions to Retaining Employees

Our advertisements for career opportunities are detailed and honest. If you are specific with what will be expected from the beginning, the employee won't feel overwhelmed or misled once starting in the position. We demonstrate the job that is to be done so there are no surprises once they are flying solo. Provide a job description in writing; this benefits the employee as much as the company. We also provide an employee handbook and specific instructions applicable to their department and find that the employee appreciates the clear definition of their job because it allows them to excel at their job.

We respect the opinion of each and every employee and recognize that they were hired for their own specific skills; we do not micro-manage. Unless an employee is on performance probation due to performance issues, closely monitoring your employees every detail will make them dissatisfied and unproductive. At every level, we allow them to make some decisions and we find they respond well to the responsibility and take pride in their work. Empower them, trust them to do their job well and allow them to contribute as they were hired to do.

We welcome them into the position by taking them on guided tours and making personal introductions during the employees first days. We offer courses like Hytek 101 and team development training. This encourages getting to know one another. We have an open door policy where everyone is welcome to approach his or her manager, co-worker or executives and we know each other by name. Hytek's "Wall of Fame" displays our pride in each employee. We recognize birthdays, tenure and have staff and family appreciation events. These little things go a long way to ensure the employees know they are valuable to our company.

We meet with new employees after 4 months, then at 16 months and then annually after that for performance reviews. We have a policy in place to communicate with our staff on a regular basis and not to save compliments or concerns for these scheduled reviews. The regular reviews and communication provides clarity to the employee exactly how they are doing. We offer clear goals and acknowledge success. We do not take their accomplishments for granted.

When an employee is promoted to management it will be because they have been successful at their previous position. This does not guarantee they will automatically have the skills required to inspire and encourage their team. They will have learned by example from other Hytek managers and picked up on tactics that they personally responded well to but we enhance this knowledge with extensive courses in management and leadership. Consider the dynamic of the entire team when you promote from within or bring in

management from outside. Management should also be consistent from department to department; inconsistencies send mixed messages and also can pit departments against one another and cause for negativity within your workplace.

Hytek encourages advancement. We offer courses, support outside courses, assist in personal development by providing language classes to immigrants and reward excellence with promotions. Employees will leave if they feel they have reached a plateau within the company. Lateral moves can be rewarding if a new challenge is required but employees work well knowing they can be promoted. We post all jobs internally first and encourage staff to contact their manager if they are interested in another position. They are not discouraged from working towards a higher pay rate or more responsibilities.

While it is rarely all about the money, it can be about the money. We strive to be fair and keep our wages and benefits on par with industry standards or above, and within what is standard for the community and province. If employees are satisfied with their workload and work atmosphere then this will be acceptable to them.

## ■ Conclusion

I am fortunate for being able to work for a company that truly believes and values their employees. Hytek owners and executives acknowledge that they wouldn't be where they are today without their employees. If you choose to wholeheartedly support this mind set and truly put employees first it won't take long before the word gets out and you will be more successful recruiting and retaining employees.