



Recruiting & Maintaining Employees at Green Bay Water

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Workforce strategies represent a critical management element in the water industry and throughout local government. Such strategies include building resources to attract, recruit, train, and retain talented and skilled employees and best practices for succession planning.

On October 6, 2020, David Ross, Asst. Admin., Division of Water, EPA, spoke at our last lead service replacement event:

“... [to] the men and women in yellow back there, our water sector workforce, today doesn’t happen without you. ... We don’t get safe drinking water to [people’s homes] without you. You are unseen, underappreciated. The world really doesn’t know the power of your workforce, and so I want to say thank you. The true environmental protection specialists, the true environmental heroes, the day-to-day people that protect our surface waters and protect our public health are the folks sitting back there ... Thanks for everything, thanks for your career choice. Thanks for what you do for a living ... keep delivering clean, safe water to the community in Green Bay.”

At Green Bay Water Utility (GBWU), we see our workforce as one of our most valued assets. We continuously strive to improve employee experience.

In 2018, we commissioned ERC, a consultant, to perform an employee engagement survey – *ARE: Attraction, Retention, Engagement Analysis*.

Employees stated many positive reasons to work at GBWU, including world-class managers, a collaborative and transparent workplace, good work/life balance (including paid holiday benefits), a culture of respect and integrity, a commitment to health and safety, stability and investment in technology, opportunities for development and progression, recognition of achievements and dedication, and a desirable location.

The survey asked employees why they applied to work at GBWU and why they stay. It also revealed areas we can improve.

According to the survey, employees' biggest concerns were pay and benefits (including health), recognition for achievements, development and progression opportunities, empowerment, and management quality. We began working toward providing solutions.

As ERC stated, regardless of industry, profession, location, and experience, employees look to organizations to provide the following:

- An Energizing Mission/Vision
- Challenging Work
- Development
- Good Pay and Benefits
- Respect

Energizing Mission/Vision

GBWU focused on having our inspiring mission as the center of all employee communication and processes.

- We were already providing a weekly “Managers Update,” so we started closing every video with our mission statement.
- We made posters with the Mission/Vision/Values and displayed them throughout our buildings.
- We also considered the results of the employee survey when updating our Mission Statement and Strategic Plan in 2020.

Challenging Work

Empowerment is one of the attributes that consistently ranks lower among GBWU employees. Providing challenges that lead to empowerment ties to the perceived quality of management and their ability to lead.

We implemented the following for managers:

- Voluntary management training classes through CVMIC.
- Mandatory special leadership training from ERC.

- Updated managers' performance evaluations and provided training to managers for performing evaluations for employees they supervise.

We also use the Gallup "Strengths Finder." Guided by Carlson Dettmann, a consultant, management took the assessment and reviewed individual findings. Managers were also able to use the tool with their staff. Gallup reports that employees who have opportunities to focus on their strengths every day are six times more likely to be engaged in their jobs and more than three times as likely to report having an excellent quality of life in general.

Development

Employees want to develop, some for personal pride and others for career opportunities. We reviewed and created development possibilities to help employees do their job better, faster, and smarter. The opportunities weren't necessarily tied to the organizational chart progression.

In 2017, GBWU hired CH2MHill (now Jacobs Engineering) to perform a workforce analysis. They interviewed over 90% of our employees regarding their job functions. They presented us with a long-term plan to structure our workforce for maximum efficiency and management reach. We created Business, Operations, Stakeholder, and Water Quality areas, allowing managers to have an optimum 5-7 direct reports. As a result, a few new positions were created and filled as needed.

Good Pay and Benefits

As described in our 2020 strategic plan, Human Capital is one of our top five strategic pillars.

It's rare for any employee to say they are paid enough, so we provide employees with their total compensation package,

detailling the value of any benefits received in addition to salary. This improves compensation transparency and how pay and benefits fit into the larger budget.

When needs/potential are not seen as met, pay/benefits often rise to the top of employees' concerns. When employees can see active improvement initiatives, the pay/benefits question becomes less of a focus.

When I took the position as the GBWU general manager in 2012, I had experience working in larger cities/areas which provided me with perspective on industry pay. While the cost of living in the Green Bay area is about 5% lower than other cities, the salaries were inconsistent with national standards for a water utility the size of GBWU, according to the American Water Works Association (AWWA).

In addition, I discovered that there were some positions at GBWU without job descriptions. I worked with a local labor attorney creating and modifying every job description and then asked the city's human resources department to vet them for consistency.

In 2014, the City of Green Bay was losing engineers so the city hired Carlson Dettmann, in conjunction with GBWU engineers, to perform an Engineering Department salary study. In 2015, GBWU hired Carlson Dettmann to conduct a salary study for the entire water utility workforce. Subsequently we worked with the Water Commission, the city's human resources staff, and the mayor, to implement the salary study. Our goal was getting all our employees to 50% of market value. While some employees exceeded that mark, other positions had to be increased over 20%. We adjusted compensation until in 2020; we began to move our employees through the designated pay progression.

In 2019, Carlson Dettmann performed a market study to ensure wage rates were at market level. We made slight adjustments but were very close to market because we had provided annual cost of living increases.

Respect

When it comes to a respectful culture, actions speak much louder than words, and must be modeled from the top. Some of our employees' comments in the engagement study indicated some work to do in this area.

Some employees felt that respect was not being demonstrated consistently so we initiated additional training for our managers. As a result of comments which demonstrated misunderstandings, we increased internal communications. In 2018, we held a "Respectful Workplace" training session with ERC for all employees.

Communication

A solid communications base supports all areas. Some employees commented that communications can be a distraction. To help all employees feel included, we enlist management in a central role. It is our leaders who most represent and build impressions of our organization's culture.

We implemented a multifaceted communications strategy:

- We produce a monthly newsletter with news from every department.
- We gave every employee a city email and set up extra computers for our field crews.
- We created an intranet for posting internal information.
- We produce a five-minute weekly video for all employees.
- We also initiated in-person meetings with each department.

Adaptability is the common thread and a key element of successful leadership no matter what type of municipal work you do. We are experiencing the fastest-moving communications and technology landscape the world has ever seen. As Ben Franklin once said, *"When you're finished changing, you're finished."*



While our story is on a positive trajectory, the Silver Tsunami is on the horizon. Preparation is key to our success. Like many other public sectors, the water and wastewater industry is maintained by a large percentage of individuals who are getting close to retirement age. According to the US Water Alliance, nationally up to 3 million workers will need to be replaced in the next decade, making up around 33% of the workforce.

The nation needs qualified, motivated water workers. This makes creating the best possible workforce strategy now even more critical.

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