

Time to Put Some Emphasis On Acquiring and Retaining Good Employees



It was a wise man in my community that once asked me what was the greatest asset that a business or for that matter any agency could possess? I thought for a few minutes and then started naming things I thought were important and of course all my answers were incorrect. That wise man told me I was being too critical of myself.

The single greatest asset a business can possess is the employee(s). It was not until I became fire chief in the early 1980's that this point became a visual concept. Our fire department

had purchased a new pumper truck – one with all the whistles and bells on it. Then it happened; the pager went off for a structure fire call. The Department has four fire stations and staff were responding from three of the four stations, and of course the shiny new truck was at the station that no one was responding from. The point to be taken here is that a new shiny fire truck while yes was a beautiful and very functional truck that cost close to \$180,000 when purchased was not worth a single cent as there was no staff available to operate the truck.

The same occurs every day in our water and wastewater systems. What are administrators and managers doing to hire and retain quality employees to operate that backhoe or any other job? I have often held the view that I would never ask an employee to do anything that I would not do. So, I think that supervisors and managers need to make it a point to get out into the field and work with the staff. This gains two things. First, that administrators really know and understand what is going on in the field. Second, it also gains respect from those working under the supervisors. Showing employees that supervisors care enough to see what they go through and that they have the necessary tools to do their jobs safely and efficiently is vitally important.

While cities, water districts, etc., are all going through tight financial times, I ask the question if we are paying staff what they are worth? Or, will a neighboring agency entice that good employee away from your agency? Does your utility offer good health insurance as well as supplemental insurance? I recently had an employee whose son was diagnosed with a rare form of cancer and he is only seven years old. Thankfully our city provides good insurance and he had a supplemental cancer policy. It may not seem like a big deal to offer the supplemental coverage but to this employee it is a major form of assistance in his son's battle with cancer. At this time the treatments are working well.

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Doc refers to me as “Mayhem”

And now, I'll turn this story to a little more personal. Anyone who knows me knows that I have had more than my share of orthopedic surgeries, from torn meniscus, twice in both knees, both shoulders rebuilt twice and the list goes on. It came to a point that my favorite orthopedic surgeon named me “mayhem” after the character in a commercial for insurance. I really felt fortunate that it had been more than a year since I had seen Dr. H. That turned out to be a jinx. I had to switch from an orthopedic doctor to a neurosurgeon. All too often we worry more about our employees than ourselves. It turned out I had a serious issue with my lumbar spine. I now proudly sport six screws, two titanium rods and bone grafts, all from wear and tear caused from activities including jumping into trenches.

I am well on the road to recovery, grafts are looking good, but frustration has set in. I feel so much better than before the surgery that I think I should be able to do anything, when in fact the stapler is the heaviest thing I am to be

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lifting. The moral of this story is to take care of yourself as well as your staff. Those meters are not going to change themselves nor will those bills mail themselves out. Some may be wondering who that wise man was that gave me such good advice. Well, it was a man by the name of George Saip who was also known to his acquaintances as “Jude”. He had previously been a superintendent for the city of Enterprise.

Even though it's still a few months away, I want to take this opportunity to encourage everyone to attend the 2018 Annual Conference & Exhibition, March 27 – 29 at Century II Convention Center in Wichita. The KRWA conference is one of the very largest water and wastewater conferences in the entire U.S. The theme is “Working Together – Weathering All Storms!” You bet, there are many storms to weather – from dealing with daily operations, new projects, regulations, personnel or governing. There will be scores of presentations that all fit under this umbrella. I hope to see you there. You'll be glad you made the investment of time to attend.

Paul Froelich is City Superintendent at Enterprise, Kan. Since 1983, he has worked extensively in law enforcement, emergency management and municipal operations. He holds numerous accreditations in Emergency Management and Fire and is a certified water and wastewater operator.



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