



**2018
AROUND
THE TABLE
SUMMARY**



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None of us is as smart as all of us.

The 2018 Around the Table Summary is a treasure-trove of best practices. It represents the valuable contributions of 34 business owners and key employees in five Raven Roundtables.

Entries may make you laugh in understanding or cringe in sympathy. You will surely nod in agreement with some statements.

Our goal is to share information that provides you with new ways to approach challenges with in your own world.

We know you will find this resource to be as valuable as the Roundtables that generated it.

The road is easier together,

A handwritten signature in blue ink on a yellow sticky note background. The signature reads "Linda" in a cursive script.

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Where and how do you find your best employees?

- We've dealt with a temporary agency when hiring managers. When we hired a new golf pro, we went to PGA America and they helped us find someone (there was no charge other than our membership dues).
- We have two categories of employees: office and factory. We use word of mouth and offer \$100 finder's fee to employees. We've tried the local movie theater, newspapers and a mobile sign. The sign works best because it's along the highway.
- We've used a headhunter and a temp agency to find people.
- I've hired three employees so far and we also have contract employees. They've all come from networking groups and people I knew. Most recently we went through a staffing agency and had a great experience.
- We're a little different because there are so many facets to our industry. First you must learn the product. It takes at least 6 months to absorb everything. Designers are hard to find. I've used word of mouth and keep my ear to the ground. When someone is looking to make a move or is new to town, we try to snap them up.
- Our chef came from another local venue and knew servers and people who would work well with him.
- We tried to use the Greater St. Cloud Development Corporation (GSDC) to find people; they don't have a fee but if you find someone through them, you have to join the association. The people you find there are higher level.
- We've used temp agencies. We have found our best team members by raising the bar on who we hire. We analyzed the skills needed to succeed in our organization. People have started to take more pride in their work. Now everyone who works at the company knows someone or is related to someone. It has its advantages and disadvantages, but team retention is better than it ever was.
- In the staffing industry, it's an ongoing recruitment opportunity.
- Presentations to the college, others through our own processes. Sometimes it can be a referral, but that can be tricky. When we hire internally, we go through a team interview process and that has helped retention.

- My business cards are always handy to hand out at events.
- LinkedIn is expensive.
- The last few we got were from LinkedIn and employee referrals (we pay a \$250 Finder's Fee after 90 days.). We advertise at schools. Ultimately, we try to find the right fit, regardless of background and experience. We also do group interviews.
- During our busy season we have 60 temporary people. Most come to us by word of mouth through friends and relatives. It's easy to find people who want to work outside in an environment that's fun and upbeat. Most of the servers also work part time somewhere else, which is an asset because they have experience.
- Word of mouth and LinkedIn. We found a really good pool of overqualified candidates through LinkedIn.
- Going forward we may use Facebook, depending on how their new algorithm is working.
- I do a lot of subcontracting; I use referrals among other subcontractors.
- I read reviews and reach out to ones who look like they'd fit.
- I get them from my friend who owns a temp agency!
- I volunteer for the Central Minnesota Jobs & Training - people seeking work say the whole process for hiring can be disheartening. Among other issues, working through the different online sites is complicated.
- We don't have to do a lot of advertising. We get people through word of mouth. We hire young people and students. We're in a small community and people ask. We tried agencies, but that never worked out. We train our people ourselves.
- Word of mouth. Referrals from employees have been good. It's rare to find kids who want to work in a tree farm and nursery, but we've been blessed and have found a few. We also hired someone right out of trade school. She was green but learned a lot. I've used some staffing agencies and it's easier to let those employees go when we get slow.

- When I need seasonal or part time workers, I go to the high school resource office and that's worked well for us. (It helped to have kids in the school, they could tell me if applicants were student's we would want to work for us). We have also hired kids from church and that's worked out too.
- I pray. When we need someone, I put it out to the universe, and they walk in the door. It's uncanny! We needed someone recently and I prayed, and the perfect candidate walked through the door.
- We find people through word of mouth. When we meet someone, who is in the business we build a relationship so I can call them when I need someone.
- We've used Craig's List and got lots of hits, but the quality isn't always there.
- We're using a temp agency and they've found good employees.
- We don't currently employ anyone. I don't like to supervise people and am not good at it. I feel uncomfortable telling people what to do and I hate hurting people's feelings.
- We subcontract out everything we need. We've even found a family-owned company who can do the janitorial work for us.
- This one's easy: my best employees walked in the door and asked if we were hiring. They knew us and our people and had some idea of what we did and how we did it. They wanted to be part of our team.
- Sometimes the best workers are older workers and they're filtered out of different sites.
- If I were hiring, I'd first go through my network and see if anyone knows someone.

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How do you decide which phone call or email gets answered? In what order?

- We have a receptionist who directs the phone calls. It's up to each of us to tell her if we are or are not taking calls. Pretty much every phone call gets through.
- The emails; I read through the list and get rid of the junk. If there are some from employees, I answer those first, customers next and then the rest as time allows.
- Our phone system directs calls to the correct person. We changed the system to take the "owners" names off the list. Only the people who know our extensions get through.
- I answer my own phone and I answer all vendor calls. If someone calls who does not know my cell phone number, I probably don't want to talk to them.
- I've got 40,000 emails in my folder now. I don't have a system, I start at the top and I sort by conversation. When I've been out, I start at the bottom.
- We're in a society today where people want answers right away; I feel like I'm always on call.
- Everything is routed to my cell phone, including my work phone (that's good and bad). I do have voice-mail-to-text, which helps.
- In the office, I will turn my phone on "DO NOT DISTURB" so I can concentrate on what I'm doing. Sometimes I minimize Outlook, so I'm not tempted to check emails.
- It's an interesting question for me because I'm involved in so many businesses. For the company I work in the most, I have trained two people to be my gatekeepers. If one or two phone calls a week get by them it's surprising. The other businesses, I take care of when I get home.
- As far as emails, I set aside 15 minutes every hour to do emails. I either delete or respond to emails during that time. Everything else is sent to a folder for later.
- Emails closest to the dollar (clients) get answered right away, followed by subject lines that catch my attention.

- Phone calls: Caller ID is key. I get so many sales calls, if I recognize the caller ID, I'll answer.
Emails; if internal, I try to get back to them right away. Closest to the dollar - absolutely!
Family - yes.
- There are too many ways to communicate and keep them all organized.
- I focus a great deal of effort on how I want to be communicated with. Some listen and some don't.
- Email works best for me because I can organize and sort.
- I usually do not take phone calls, especially when I'm in a meeting. I've set up a system with my key people and if a caller calls back twice, it's an "I need to talk to you now".
- First is family, especially the ones who never ever call.
- Sometimes, my clients only have time to talk on holidays, weekends or after hours. I'm beginning to set boundaries
- There are five or six ways for a client to contact me and they use them all (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, texts and Instagram).
- Subject line is key for email; I've had clients who dig up year-old emails and respond.
- When it comes to business, it's sales first and client follow-up next.
- #1 will be family (I have two kids under the age of 21 driving), #2 Clients: Ones who have the orders gets my attention first and ones who have issues next, #3 Vendors
- We have learned to ask people the "key question" up front: *How do you want to communicate?*

- If you're out of office, PLEASE put "out of office" in your message.
- Unless people are marketing something that I'm interested in, I don't bother answering calls or emails from people I don't know.
- If it's a customer, they ALL get answered. I work my way down the line priority-wise. Even when a customer is vague about what they want - they might have a half million-dollar project! You never know, that's why they all get answered.
- I pick up very few calls in my office. I use my caller ID and I let them know to utilize my voice mail. I follow up on voice mails within a day. If it's important, I call back immediately.
- As for email, I try to never have a lot of emails pending. On the first look-through, I unsubscribe and delete everything I can. Then I go to the oldest and respond to them. I almost always respond within an hour.
- I try to take phone calls first - if it's on my mobile phone I answer those. I use caller ID religiously.
- Customers we are working with on projects come first. Texts are always best for me. Very few people call me on my cell phone.
- I don't have a formal strategy except that customers are first!
- My sales manager uses all the different communication avenues i.e. LinkedIn & Facebook messages, etc. I told him don't bother with those for me: calls or emails only.
- Customers first. And my employees know that. If I have spare time, I'll take the other calls (marketing).
- I may move customer calls to my sales team.
- I get hundreds of emails every day (at one point it was over 4000 a day, but we now have a new spam filter). Once, I did have emails down to "zero unread". I leave the ones I have to respond to as UNREAD.

- I have six or eight email accounts. I work through the ones that are work related first.
- I have a separate email that I use strictly for shopping sites.
- Phone calls; one of the first workshops I took for newspaper editors was “DON’T ANSWER THE PHONE!” Someone answers the phone in the office and screens all the calls. I delegate the few messages that request a return call.
- Every phone call gets answered within five rings. I’m hesitant when the caller ID reads PRIVATE CALLER. I also call every voice mail back - it’s common courtesy.
- Urgent ones get answered and I determine that by subject. Customers come first.
- I’ve always had systems for my email; when I get emails from a client, I “red flag” them so they show up on top.
- Sometimes I don’t reply when I should - like letting people know when I have information for them.
- I’ve been staying away from phones because no one ever wants to answer the phone. However, with my current clients, I do take calls. I’m careful to only answer calls when I’m at my desk and not on the road. (It’s a safety concern.)
- I don’t answer phone calls when I don’t know who they are.

What numbers (or Key Performance Indicators) do you look at to make sure your business is on track?

- We do a Traction Scorecard. Our sales manager reports pending sales and compares to where we were in previous years.
- Cash - what's currently in the checkbook.
- I look at the following reports:
 - Profit and loss and YTD comparison
 - Net worth graphs.
 - Months of growth, amount of debt
 - Balance in checking account at the end of the year because I'm a seasonal business and this money has to last until spring. (Tree farm)
- Board feet produced: daily, weekly, monthly. (Custom molded panels and cabinet components)
- The biggest number is MRR (monthly recurring revenue) it's our sales number (we get compensated based on how much our customer's bill). (Telecommunications)
- Fresh sales per month
- Checkbook
- Gross sales per labor hour - variable so we look at a rolling average comparing one, three and nine weeks. (Manufacturing)
- We compare monthly sales to previous year.
- I look at the checkbook and go, "oh, well!" and then I get motivated.
- Internal on-time delivery (did we cause the delay?)
- External on-time delivery

- Accounts receivable, payable and inventory
- Daily production reports by machining center
- The Weekly Business Analysis Report. Everyone on the team sees the report and it's posted on the whiteboard wall. We even play "the game" of guessing where the numbers will land in a given week. The report covers:
 - Gross margin
 - Billable hours
 - # Clients billed
 - # Associates
 - # New clients
- We use a 16-week rolling forecast. (Manufacturing)
- Forecast by operation/process - how many hours will be needed in the upcoming weeks?
- We also track:
 - Units sold
 - Sales
 - Cost per unit
 - Blades produced per labor hour
 - Blades per month per employee
- I track many things:
 - Money in the bank.
 - Advertising goal - if we hit and exceed that number, we're golden.
 - Percentage of advertising per column inch. 50% advertising used to be the gold standard, now it's 40%. (Newspaper)
- We use a Sales Conversion sheet that includes users who visit our website. (Event center)
 - How many inquiries received?
 - How many tours did we give?
 - How many sales were booked?

- We track each booking by day of the week
- Total beverage and food

- Cash flow

- We look at memberships sold, income by leagues and events booked. All are compared to previous years. We also keep close track of our revenues and expenses monthly. (Golf course)

- Sales (Are our sales people making their goals?) We follow the Sandler's Sales Training model.

- I look at sales in cue and ask myself, *"Who can I bill this week?"*

- I just hired a bookkeeper who balances the books each month. It's made me look at different numbers and it's a business check-in.

- Cash flow. Every. Single. Day. I use an excel spreadsheet

- Sales pipeline weekly and look at the mark-up factor on each customer. We also do a post mortem on every sale to make sure we've made the minimum mark-up goal, because commissions are based on this number. (Custom Retail Fixtures)

- It sounds terrible, but I don't keep track of any numbers. I know where I want the monthly revenue to be and look to see if we hit that.
 - I'm big on processes; every week I review what I need to buy, and who I need to buy from. I focus on sales and follow-ups. When I follow the processes, the company runs well.

- Financial statements: Budget to Actual, Income Statement and the Balance Sheet.

- What projects did we bid? How many of them hit our schedule? I do a cost analysis of each project, but I like to look at the big picture.

- We close every month. We ask ourselves:
 - Did we hit our revenue target?

- What are the variances that stand out in the Cost of Goods Sold?
 - We have a robust ERP, it's easy to get at the number but understanding the cause is a good way to stay connected with the people on the floor. (Manufacturing)
- We have a service business with yearly contracts. To be honest, sometimes I just put my head in the sand and say I don't want to look at things today. But most of the time I check to see if each person is carrying their own weight, performing up to expectations and how many accounts they're carrying in their portfolio. (Telecommunications)
 - It's really hard to find leading indicators because our project lead times are so long (up to a year or more) and the projects are so big. (Design & build one-of-a-kind machines.)
 - Gross Margin dollars per labor dollar. That directly drives profitability in the most significant way. It's changed the way we quote jobs and focused us on the work we should be taking. (Manufacturing)
 - Current bank balance. If I can make the payment for my line of credit, I'm on track. (Trainer, Professional organizer)
 - The percentage of total hours charged to jobs. (Manufacturer)
 - We track continuous improvement. We created a log and track the different types of discrepancies. (Manufacturer)
 - We keep a board that covers discrepancies - we focus on only shipping good parts. We also include the total cost of each discrepancy. As a result, the big mistakes have lessened. (Manufacturer)
 - How many classes were scheduled, how many were held and how many attendees? I also keep track of how full my calendar is booked out. (Professional trainer)
 - We have a lot of activity in my business. I track:
 - Weekly Sales,
 - Deposits on jobs and in the bank,
 - Vehicles finished and delivered,
 - Hours clocked by technicians,
 - Customer phone calls,
 - Number of estimates written

- Estimates captured and not captured rate
 - Efficiency by technician
 - Overall efficiency
 - Hours sold
 - Accounts receivable, accounts payable
 - Balance in all accounts (Automobile Body Shop)
-
- Monthly sales compared to last year and profitability. (Retail)

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How do you clarify expectations with employees? (New hires & existing)

- I have job descriptions, but they aren't as clear as I would like. We need to improve on this. Often, expectations are not clarified until a screw up happens and that's not ok. We aren't very good at communicating.
- Depends a lot on the managers; we try to address things as they come up and meet with managers weekly.
- We have managers that do jobs that we owners don't have the time to do. There's a lot of trust between us all. There's always the question, *Am I doing this right?* Most of our maintenance people are older, retired people who know the job and get it done. I struggle with new hires and younger workers
- New hires: We clarify expectations on the job interview and continue to reinforce them at 30, 60, 90 day and annual reviews. I let employees know that my door is always open, and issues are addressed immediately. I also stress that the door is a revolving door and has to swing both ways.
- We could do better on clarifying expectations.
- Existing employees: We have a one-on-one meeting, take notes and list who is responsible for what. We ensure the conversation is documented.
- We have job descriptions and try to clarify as we go along, daily, weekly etc... A lot of it is process. We too struggle with expectations. Expectations are different for a long-term employee vs. new hire. I try to be open to the fact that everyone is different and does things differently, but time is money and there are more efficient ways to accomplish tasks.
- I keep a notebook out and available for everyone to write in, I write down expectations and/or updates. Everyone, including me, has to read and initial it.
- I have one-on-one meetings. I address issues as they come up, before they go awry. I can talk about where we are and where we need to be.

- Job descriptions; I have gone overboard with very detailed descriptions, highlighting duties. “Other duties as assigned” is always the last item.
- We have frequent one-on-one meetings to address concerns as they come up. I like to talk about things now, not 6 months from now or at an annual review.
- I always include expectations in my offer letter. Depending on their role, we have a 90-day trial: If they are going to make it past 90 days, we decide on a pay raise at that time. Sales people have a longer trial period. We do annual reviews for all staff.
- Our hiring process is pretty clear, but our approach is different for skilled vs unskilled workers. We talk more about behavior with skilled laborers and clearly state their hours and job expectations. We provide a lot of instruction on “how to’s” and stress the importance of asking questions and having ongoing and open communication. We also do reviews.
- We have very little turn-over. We do not have formal, written job descriptions but we spend a lot of time with each new hire. It has worked well.
- We stress customer service. Everyone is different with different attitudes and personalities. We’ve worked with employees to create their own job descriptions, so they take ownership. We have monthly meetings and lead by example. We are in the process of making changes and re-doing job descriptions.
- Most openings are for general labor and start out in the front. There is not a specific process because it changes frequently. Everyone gets the same new hire speech and I let them know they are empowered to do their job. We try to cross-train everyone. There are 30, 60, 90-day reviews but I’m not strict about it. I meet with the team weekly and encourage constant coaching and teaching.
- I convey customer expectations and go over our procedures to make sure they’re understood and followed. I also stress expectations in working with each other, encouraging people to bring up issues right away so they don’t fester.
- Quality management is well documented and explained. We hold regular team meetings and have hired an HR person to help us develop processes in our hiring process.

- Current employees: we keep everyone apprised of what's coming up and what will be expected of them for their jobs. We also add "why" it's done the way it is. Most of this is designated by our customers and how they want the work done.
- My problems come when I don't clarify my expectations. I have high standards for people, but I'm not good at expressing what I'm looking for, so they don't even know. I struggle with believing that if I don't do it myself, it's not done right.
- I want people to be the best they can be, but sometimes I push too hard.
- For customers, I want the work to be perfect. I want them to get the best I have. Sometimes they don't want that - so that makes the jobs go easier.
- Even when I tell a person how a job needs to be done, they can't do it, if they don't want to do it. Our leadership team has been attending conferences together, that's helped open dialogue. They've been working with me for quite a while and know what I want.
- I need to do better at explaining expectations and I'm working on it. I have lists. My mother and I are the only full-time employees in the business. I try to allow people to pick their responsibilities according to their strengths and the best use of time.
- In the Café we are working on a manual with clear expectations.
- For the retail store, I provide a weekly letter outlining clear expectations. We are tweaking the employee handbook. We constantly stress customer service beginning with a sincere greeting for every customer when they walk in the door.
- If I had employees (none at present), I would have an employee handbook and hold regular meetings and workshops regarding company climate and culture. The companies I most enjoyed working for in the past had these tools and they were invaluable.

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Have you found exit interviews are worth the time? If so, what are the most important questions you ask on exit interviews?

- We have used exit interviews. Corporate revamped the process recently. Typically, a few days before an employee leaves, I give them a form with questions such as:
 - What does the next job offer that this one did not?
 - What training did you receive?
 - Any feedback that you'd like to give on your training?
 - Do you have any feedback on communication with your supervisor?
- I make sure I go through the form in full detail. I always make a point to show interest and wish them well. That gives me the opportunity to call if I have questions after they've left.
- I've become more accepting in my interaction with exiting employees, acknowledging if they don't feel that this was the right place for them.
- I deal with people who don't like conflict or confrontation very much. They would much rather text their answers. I have received some good feedback this way.
- If I have noticed that someone is leaving due to a bad situation (that they created) I may not give them the exit interview.
- HR usually deals with departing employees seeking answers to concerns such as:
 - Was the training for their position adequate?
 - What could the company improve on?
 - How was your relationship with your supervisor?
 - Training is a top priority: Was it a factor in you leaving?
- I found exit interviews to be extremely helpful. Our office person (Director of First Impression) took care of them. She'd get very honest feedback.
- In order to receive their last paycheck, departing employees need to complete an exit interview and return uniforms, keys etc. *(It was pointed out that this is not legal.)*
- We had seasonal crews and we arranged exit interviews at the end of every season.

- We include questions such as:
 - What would it have taken to make you stay?
 - What could we have done differently to have you not looked in the first place?

- I've never done one. But I have had one done to me when I quit a job working for the State of Minnesota. I misunderstood what it was. I was attempting to give them pointers and tips, but the person was only interested in checking off boxes to prove that they'd followed process.

- Sometimes I wish I could do an exit interview with clients in order to understand their concerns.

- Even though it may appear to be perfunctory, the information from the exit interview usually goes to another level and is given another look. There may be an indicator of a bigger issue.

- Recruiters are aggressively seeking qualified employees because they realize their value.

- Presently, our exit interviews are bad, the questions are:
 - Where can I send your last check?
 - Why are you quitting?
 - It's on my "to do list" to improve on this.

- When people quit, they get their check on their last day. If they're terminated, they get it the day they are let go.

- We have learned some very worthwhile information from the exit interviews we've done.

- Our business is seasonal; we use a lot of college students who are more interested in their future careers than the seasonal work they do for us.

- When it comes to the manager, if it's their choice to leave, the check is cut that day. We know why they're leaving - usually it's due to poor performance.

- We don't have that many people and don't do exit interviews. Our turnover is minimal.
- Exit interviews are extremely important to us owners. We have a new HR person who does only what she is told. Exit interviews are being neglected at present, but they are going to improve.
- We've had a lot of people quit (we've only fired 2 people). I often wonder, are they running from something or running to something? 80% of the time when individuals give a two-week notice, we pay them, and they're gone the day of the notice.
- An exit interview helps us see behind the curtain. It helps us learn what employees have experienced. Even though we feel we have an open-door policy, it is good to see how the employee perceived that.
- We make it abundantly clear in the exit interview that when an employee quits, we will not take them back. (although now we're rethinking that.)
- Sometimes exit interviews are a good way to have a laugh. Employees who have nothing to lose will say the most amazing things!
- I've had a few people leave by choice, but they didn't have the guts to tell me to my face. They quit by text or email.
- Many of our people left because of the commute - they wanted to work closer to home.
- We had a designer who quit because of distance. He drove an electric car and the commute was so long that he couldn't turn on the heat because he wouldn't have enough battery life.
- Understanding the underlying cause of a person's decision to move on could be valuable information for going forward. It's not always something heard in the workplace. It could be a management issue. We ask:
 - What was the cause for considering making a move? Not so much why you made your final decision, but what made you consider looking? What triggered it?

- We've never done a lot of formal exit interviews, but when we do, I have someone else do it.
 - The downside of that is you get someone else's interpretation of the conversation. I want to know if I screwed something up that caused them to leave. When the last person left, I did not realize how unhappy he was. I hate being blindsided like that.
- We invest a lot in training, when someone quits it's all for nothing.
- What is the target retention or average number of years you can expect an employee to stay?
- I'm in the middle of a situation now and know it's happening: "Is there a reason you're leaving?"
- I've never given one. Usually they run out the door screaming, "*I hate you!*" and I'm screaming "*I hate you!*" back at them! (Joke)
- When I was in college, I had a part time job at a hospital. When I gave my notice to go back to school, the supervisor asked me "*Why are you leaving?*". He had forgotten that he hired me for a temporary, part-time position.
- I've done a couple exit interviews and have gotten some good out of them. We're a small enough business we generally know what's going on and why. There could be some positives for the long term,
- We do exit interviews. They are done by HR. We only do them when people leave voluntarily. If they are terminated, we don't.
- We administer exit interviews internally. We ask:
 - Why are you leaving?
 - Please critique your supervisor.
 - Critique your job responsibilities.
- Someone was working well and then retired. I valued their opinion, so I asked:
 - What could we change so things would work better?

- Were the job descriptions adequate?

- My favorite exit by an employee was one who started on Tuesday, worked the whole day, then texted me on Wednesday morning saying that I didn't value her, that I was a terrible boss and that she was quitting.

- I've never given one. I try to make sure the person leaves on a good note, I tell them how much they meant to the team.

- I've only participated in an exit meeting. It generic and was just about leaving the company.

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What do you do better than all your competition? (This is called your core competency)

- We're there for them.
 - I've always said with good technology and good machinery anyone can do what we do. With us, it's all about the relationship we have with our customers. We respond quickly and if there's a problem we resolve quickly. We're there for them.
- We exceed expectations.
 - We've had an experience of hosting a very important event for a local, family-owned company. They did a golf outing and a dinner for clients from all over the world. They wanted it to be impressive, giving special attention to the attendees. They'd never had a meeting at our facility before and their event coordinator was panicking. She emailed everyone in our organization to make sure we met expectations. She drove staff bananas. She wanted pictures and details because all the VIPs would be there. After the event. she sent us an email thanking us and saying we had far exceeded their expectations.
- Communicate critical information effectively.
 - We hired a CFO specialist to provide advice and oversight and to help our staff understand the "big picture". We had been using a large accounting firm who never shared such valuable information with us. She was able to communicate critical information in a language we understood. That was her core competency.
- Implementation.
 - In the telecommunications industry our competitors usually sell the service and move on. It's the way the industry works. However, when we sell a project, we listen to the customer in order to understand their needs and then stay with the project until it's done. We make sure what the customers wanted is what they got. That's our core competency.
- We never say no, we figure it out!
 - Ours is tough to define; we don't have a widget or a commodity. We have flexibility. When we get a phone call from a customer and they have an issue we react. We always try to meet their changing or unique needs - whatever they may be. Our customers have told us they'd been told no so many times they thought they'd have to go to China. We helped them figure it out.

- We treat customers right.
 - We have three domestic competitors. We provide better service than any of them and have deeper relationships.

- We're relevant!
 - We adapt quickly and are not afraid to change with or against trends. We're relevant! It's fun to do something and then watch our competitors copy our idea.

- Coaching, building relationships, education and adding value.
 - I know because I hear that from our customers. They come to us to clean up others' messes (competitors). I hold follow-up and project appointments.

- We do what our competitors don't and won't.
 - They don't have the skills or the equipment we do. We also offer value engineering and all in-house.

- Relationships.
 - Our business is very relationship based. I get along well with the competition and we even buy products from each other. We have an informal agreement not to get into each other's turf. (In fact, our main competition used to run my company).

- Relationships.
 - Relationships are key: Spoil the long-term customers and keep them close. Our competitors don't compare and don't seem to appreciate the relationships. It's our secret sauce.

- Our specialty is our ability to deliver a quality product, shipped on time, over and over and over.

- We pride ourselves on not over-promising and under-delivering. Our customers appreciate that. Now with the tight labor market, we are especially aware of producing a quality product, to under-promise and over-deliver.

- We pay a lot of attention to risk because our business is profoundly affected by experienced workers reaching retirement age. Risk is top of mind in every strategic decision we make and new job we accept. But it can be hard to measure.

- Organizational Health
 - When you're a job shop, you're a commodity. What do I do? I sell capacity (equipment and people). My journey of what I would like to do better than anyone else is organizational health. Employee retention and strategy is going to separate a great company from the masses. I want people to be engaged, happy, feel like they're solving their own problems and taking ownership. A workplace needs to be free from toxic behaviors and gossip behaviors. I've been very selective about who I let in. We're about 18 months into this experiment.

- We're excellent at clarifying expectations up front.
 - We stick with projects until they're done. If machines don't work right away, we stay with the project until they do.

- I spend a lot of time finding out what new customers are unhappy about.

- We show up and are present. We manage properties for associations and report to a board of directors (which might change every year). We get a flow going, get involved, show up and be present. We try to keep everyone happy.

- We're BIG on communication.
 - One of our customers spent thousands of dollars for shipping because of a production glitch on their part. We helped them out and they appreciated our responsiveness. If it's a big deal to them, it's a big deal to us. You can't do work for everyone; you have to pick the customers who fit you.

- Relationships.

- We've always had a hard time answering this question because there are hundreds of job shops out there. It's hard to know what sets us apart. We're good at specific types of welding. We send out customer surveys. Our project managers are very responsive. Custom work requires a lot of back and forth and our customers appreciate an immediate response.
- Artisan cheese.
 - We're the best at producing artisan cheese. We're hands on with customers shipping what they need. Our competition is basically Wisconsin. We've seen a big influx of unusual, specialty cheese in the area, but producing artisan cheese is our core competency.
- Knowledge of plants is second to none.
 - I've planted every kind of plant there is and made every mistake in the book. A large market of ours is landscapers. They don't know squat about plants, what will grow well in what kind of soil. It's an art, a skill and a science.
- Willingness to take care of detail.
 - In addition to being the biggest body shop in the area, we stand out more for our willingness to take care of the details. We work with our customers' insurance companies and fight to get things right for them. We jump through hoops for our customers, going the extra mile in added value.
- We embrace short runs.
 - We have an excellent engineering staff and we do a lot of prototype work for companies. We've been around 25 years. Customers know we're trustworthy. Loyalty is almost non-existent these days, but we stand behind our work. If we make a mistake, we will do our best to make it right.
- We care more.
 - We care more than our competition. The competition is there to make a buck, but we "suffer the details". It's like an arrow in the heart when we get something wrong. We pay attention to all the details. Also, we don't charge for every little thing (cemetery clean-up or class reunions, obituaries or book announcements) the way others do. If someone wants something specific and out of the ordinary, we may charge for that.

- We have heart and ears.
 - We have a heart and an ear to listen to customers. Our customers feel that when they come to our store they are among friends and have someone to talk to.

- Strategy.
 - I am a strategic thinker and very organized - it's how my brain works.

- Attention to detail.
 - Our core competency is paying attention to detail. CPAs are cut from that cloth. Of course, that competency can be a weakness too. We have a very personal relationship with our clients. I have trouble going the extra mile and not charging for that. When things are busy, and we can't give that extraordinary service, it weighs on me.

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Describe your relationship with your banker

- The story goes back to when we were first talking about developing. We got involved with American Heritage National Bank. The president of American Heritage started out in Long Prairie. In 2000, when we were building the business, they were aggressively looking for business. They were smart bankers and had serious connections with the Long Prairie Country Club, so they knew our industry.
 - When the President passed away, we were assigned a young banker. We were skeptical, but he took the time to come out and meet with us. He was a great fit and was very helpful as the business grew. When our husbands passed away and my partner and I took over the business, American Heritage came in and reviewed our operation. They advised us to get rid of a key employee, but we just couldn't. The banker went above and beyond our expectations and connected us with a potential buyer. That deal didn't work out, but we appreciated that they had our best interest at heart. What we've learned is that banking local is really good.
- I love my banker! He bends over backwards for us. If we're having an issue with anything, Mike will come over and help us out. He even went to bat for us with the point-of-sale software company when they mischarged us. They're professional and warm but not ingratiating like some of the banks who have tried to court us.
- We're at MidWestOne, and we haven't had to do much with them because we haven't needed anything out of the ordinary. I like the local touch; their employees have been there a long time and they know who we are. Whenever we have problems, they fix it.
- My partner and I had been with Wells Fargo for years and years. They were pretty hands-off. I met a business banker from Falcon National Bank at a networking event and was impressed. We decided to move our business. The new banker spent time with me getting to know my business and when it was time to switch, she made it easy. My banker has become a friend. It's sad in a way, that it's so easy to bank online, we don't get to connect as much as we used to. Last month I saw a fee on my bank statement, I called her, and she took care of it. The ability to do remote deposits is a real time saver!
- I'm a bit removed from the banking relationship because my partner (my husband) is so good at it. I've watched him and have learned the following:
 - Find a smart banker and learn all you can about the person and the organization.
 - Ask good questions about the services they offer and the fees they charge.

- Don't take their first offer (in a loan or line of credit). Do your homework and know what the other banks offer.
 - Stay educated on the services you need and the competition in the area.
 - Banking relationships are critical to a businesses' success. Nurture them.
- It's much better these days than it used to be!
 - I've learned that it's okay to date other bankers. If you have a well-established relationship with your banker, you're not cheating. It's smart business.
 - When we were starting a large construction project for our business, we had a falling out with Wells Fargo. We looked around and the president of a local credit union verbally agreed to give us the money we needed. We purchased materials and had started construction when the call came in that the loan committee denied our loan. We were shocked and really had to scramble to find another bank to work with.
 - A friend recommended BankVista and within two weeks we had the loan approved and the paperwork signed.
 - I learned nothing about finance from my parents, except that you never had debt; you paid everything off. Then I married my first husband. We were in the racing business and he started buying cars. When I asked him how we could afford these things, he said, "*Oh, I just called my banker.*" In the long-run that didn't work and neither did the marriage.
 - Now my only banker for my business is credit cards and I work very hard to pay them off.
 - This is the 26th years for my business. When I started my company, my Mom was on the board of directors at the bank where we did business. We're still with that bank today. I have checking account and line of credit. That's all I need.
 - My customers provide money for their machines by making a down payment and then regular progress payments as the job progresses. We have run across some customers who don't want to work that way. They want to pay \$0 down and terms of 60 days; we don't do business with them
 - My goal is to eventually run my business debt free.
 - We are growing rapidly, and I needed to double my line of credit recently. We're do business with a small-town bank; I signed the papers the same day. It was easy.

- I don't have any relationships with bankers other than my own. We bank with MidWestOne. Our bank is local, and the banker is personable. He's involved and visible with the school and in the community.
- I am my own banker and we have a terrible relationship!
- I haven't had to talk to a banker in years; before that it was bad. I'd maxed out my line of credit and there was no more money. I've slowly worked my way out of the hole. Now I work with Compeer Financial (used to be AgStar). I'm not crazy about my personal banker.
- Throughout my career, I've tried to have a relationship with my banker, but they keep retiring. Whenever I get a new one, I try to get to know them. I respect their expertise and expect them to help me when I need it.
At the county fair, I ran into a banker who retired two bankers ago. I chatted with him for a half hour. I like the local touch. It's important to do business with people you know and who support your community.
- Mutually tolerant.
- Distant. I don't have a person whom I would consider a personal business banker. I bank at US Bank and I went there because of a banker I met in a networking group.
- I don't really have a relationship with our banker. When I bought the business, we changed to a new bank. We went with BankVista. We didn't have any issues, but we were downtown, and they were in Sartell. We do deposits every day and it was inconvenient to drive so far. We switched to Falcon National Bank; they're very nice people to work with. My banker in particular is great to work with - very hands-on. I also like that they're involved with the Art Crawl downtown.

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What benefits do you offer your employees?

Manufacturing

- 6 Holidays
- PTO (accrues but the employee is not able to take until they have been there 1 year. (Can roll up to 160 hours.)
- Simple IRA with 3% match
- HSA Plan
- Health insurance (we pay half the employee's premium)
- AFLAC (Disability, life and accident)
- Paid training
- Vision insurance
- Dental insurance

Hospitality

- AFLAC
- Simple IRA match 3%
- Free golf
- Discount on meals but none on alcohol
- Managers get one meal a day when the grill is open
- Vacation (2 weeks after 1 year, 3 after 5 years)
- Super flexible on hours, family needs, etc.
- Work in a beautiful environment
- Birthday lunches for key staff

Technology

- PTO (Starts with 2 weeks)
- 7 Holidays
- 401(k)
- Outings, lunches,
- Flexibility in working hours
- Birthday lunches for the whole team and I give a gift certificate to the person whose birthday it is.

Manufacturing

- Paycheck
- 8 holidays (we include Veterans Day) plus a float day
- PTO for everyone (no max)
- Health insurance (we cover 100% of employee's premium)

- Offer HSA
- 90% participation in whole life insurance
- Goal sharing (after 6 months) - Lowest employees got 3 weeks' pay last year)
- IRA match up to 3%
- We pay weekly
- They get to use company machines for personal projects, and we give material at cost, but they must obey the same safety rules. (They must sign a disclaimer in case they get hurt.)
- The owner cooks a meal the 3rd Thursday of every month

Professional Services

- Health insurances
- Supplemental benefits
- PTO
- Paid training and the travel to get there
- Simple 401(k)
- Lots of internal incentives (gift cards, contests)
- Bonus

Hospitality

- Simple IRA
- Pizza and beverages on wood fired Wednesdays
- Free food and dessert sampling
- Beautiful offices
- Lots of flexibility with working hours

Technology

- At this time, I use all independent contractors, but I do give them a roll of quarters - we park downtown and parking is at meters. Millennials don't usually have quarters in their pockets

Retail

- 401(k)
- Paid holidays
- PTO
- Health insurance
- Dental insurance
- Life insurance

Engineering Services

- Pay bi-monthly
- Pay 50% of employee's personal health insurance (not family)
- 401(k) - put 5% in plan whether or not the employee makes an investment
- Opportunity to learn & succeed
- No policy on vacation or sick. I say, if you need time off, take time off and it's not been overly abused.
- Paid holidays
- I pay for work-related training
- HSA
- \$50/month goes to insurance of employee's choosing (ie..disability)

Manufacturing

- Health insurance - HSA high deductible (75% Employee and 60% family)
- Contribute to employee deductible (\$500 and \$1,000)
- Life insurance \$50,000 and \$2,000 spouse and children
- Long term disability (employee pays the taxes, so they don't pay tax on benefit)
- 401(k) match 50% up to 6%
- Profit sharing based on personal performance. (We use our EOS core values on everyone and do individual goals)
- Education - must be employed a year, will pay up to 75% of training (management skills, machining, welding). However, they must complete the course first. If they get a degree, we pay other 25% after 18 months.
- 9-1/2 paid holidays

Food Manufacturing

- Overtime
- Paid holidays
- Vacation / PTO
- Cheese discount
- Bring lunch in occasionally for everyone
- Summer we do a special lunch off site (because Christmas season is too busy to do that)

Retail

- They're lucky to have a job
- I don't beat them anymore (joke)
- I pay overtime
- I gave employees a raise to cover health insurance

- Wholesale pricing to family members and employees
- If people want to borrow tools, I let them
- Paid holidays

Training

- They get to work from home, occasionally
- They get to bring their pets to work

Automotive

- 5 paid holidays
- Uniforms
- Vacation / PTO
- Christmas bonus
- Profit sharing bonus
- Parts at cost
- Employees get to use shop & equipment for personal projects
- I gave a raise to cover insurance costs

US Department of Labor

- FMLA (Family Medical Leave Act) can be used when donating an organ

General Mills

- Financial Helpline (Free, confidential and unbiased financial education on a wide range of topics)
- Pet insurance
- Group legal plan (Convenient and affordable legal representation for frequently needed legal services.)
- Group life, home & auto insurance
- Long term care (Group rates on long-term care insurance for employees and loved ones.)
- Extra paid time off for bonding with babies, taking care of aging parents or seriously ill family members, partners and adoptive parents beginning January 2019

Does your company have a vision?

A vision statement is who you want to be and where you want to go.

A mission is what you are doing with your business to get there.

- Leave the world a better place.
- To be the best family owned golf and event center in Central Minnesota.
- To be the trusted choice representing businesses.
- The problem I run into, is that I have a vision, but who's following me?
- To provide the best support and customer service in the industry.
- Our vision is to take our company and experience and knowledge to a new area that is our future.
- I don't have a written vision statement on the wall. What I consider is, do the employees understand what the goals are? Is there organizational clarity in the way we create policies? It's not about building sales but it's about organizational health for my company. When we're healthy we'll attract really good employees and they will help us grow the company and have a sense of ownership.
 - My personal Mission statement is to help people - if I can help my people it will help families and will help our community.
- That's something I've been working on with my team for the past 3 or 4 months. Our vision is still a little blurry.
- We don't have anything called a vision. Through Traction, we picked a core focus which is to WOW the customer, but I didn't like it. We've been Wowing the customer for so long that I feel as though WOW has become the new normal. I always want to satisfy the customer, but not to the extent that we wow ourselves out of business.

- To be THE professional development alternative for child care professionals and all those who care for children and families.
- We help people through their automotive collision process and making it smooth and delivering the result of their dreams.
- Our vision is to get back to where we were. Our products will be better. They will be back to where they were before we got back into retail.

Define the hiring process in your company

- I use Indeed, Facebook and LinkedIn. We do networking, but more on the social side. I found our Director of First Impressions through a referral and she kept calling me. On the first interview we talked about the actions and the feelings and communication. On the second interview we got into the meat of the position.
- We have multiple people sit in on the interview each taking notes. At the end of every interview we do a ranking/score sheet.
- Our hiring process is changing. We do a phone interview, an in-depth interview, a developer interview and a team interview. Job seekers are not engaged in the interview if they don't feel a connection with the people they're going to work with.
 - We try to make that first connection warm - people want to visit. We ask:
 - What do you want to do in 6 years?
 - How have you changed in the last couple years?
 - We share information about ourselves
 - We do a rating/score sheet after the team interview
- I start by calling my favorite staffing company - we usually do temp to hire. It works great.
- My hiring process involves actual communication. I explain my company and because I'm small and may not have full time work for them. I tell them if they're good, I'll refer them to others who need their skills.
- Millennials remember every company where they applied and the ones who didn't respond.
- We used an agency for our lead person.
 - We have job descriptions, although we use a general job description on Indeed and MN Works. Indeed coached us to make the job description simple. It gets a lot more people in the door.

- Once they're in the door, our HR person identifies the qualified applicants and forwards them to the supervisor. If the supervisor likes the person, we give them an offer letter that states the offer is contingent upon passing a drug test and background check.
- When we hire, it's usually a new position. The first thing we do is identify what tasks we need the person to do and the type of person we want in our office.
 - The last one we hired was through a staffing agency and that was totally worth it. We got three good applicants and hired one. It only costs us, when all is considered, about 20% of wages.
- We don't have many hiring opportunities. The hiring process depends on the area where we need the person. Do we need a designer, staff assistant or a driver?
 - We don't advertise in the paper - too expensive. We've been using the social media and word of mouth.
 - We have a short application and assume they have a resume. Once we meet, we try to figure out if their personality is a fit for our culture. We have a creative culture. A lot of it for me is gut instinct.
- We've learned, we make them take the "ruler test" before even filling out an application. (The ruler test is, can they read a tape measure?)
 - We have completely eliminated all radio and print advertising. We have three temp agencies who work for us. They scour all the social sites looking for applicants.
 - Of the hires we've had, 60% came from temp agencies, 40% from word of mouth. We've had three temps make it to full time (out of 22 applicants). They usually leave us. We're in a small town and there's a reason they're floating around unemployed.
 - Word of mouth is huge. Nine of our 31 teammates are related in some way.
 - We have our HR person (who has 51% of the vote) do the interview with other teammates (49% of the vote) observing. If they pass that stage, we take them on a tour. That weeds them out more (on both sides).

- We get them started and they have a 30-day period to become full time teammate.
- If an applicant is currently employed, it's an orange flag. We've been used as a "negotiation pawn" with current employers too often.
- In the early days, when the plant opened in 1968, we followed the 3M values. 3M valued farming and rural areas. 3M had been having union issues and strikes, the move to a small town was to attract rural workers. They told everyone they were hired as temporary employees.
 - Now we hire based on what we can learn about the employee in a short amount of time (interview process). We go into the relationship knowing that if they meet the expectations, they'll be with us a long time. If we're looking for an experienced person in a highly skilled position, we use a more traditional process.
- I worked for a guy who had the philosophy "Many are called, few are chosen." He'd let anyone in the door. I never cared for that process. I hire technical people, engineering types. I like to have a relationship with the person prior to interviewing them.
 - I ask lots of questions. We make machines that put things together. I give the person an object and ask them to describe the machine that put it together.
- We use a two-pronged approach.
 1. We pay employees a \$750-dollar finder fee and have gotten decent referrals.
 2. For the last 18 months, we've been recruiting basically on Facebook. We've gotten 50- 60 applicants. We have three steps for the ones who come through Facebook:
 - Look at their Facebook profile.
 - HR will call them and do a telephone interview if our research panned out.
 - If the phone interview goes well, the supervisor of area and operations manager meets the applicant.
 - We use the 3rd step to make a good impression, because I know they're vetting us as much as we're vetting them.
 - If they pass that test, the final is a meeting with me. We subscribe to a method called hungry, humble and smart (by Patrick Lencioni)

- If their character doesn't fit the culture, they're not hired. Word is getting around that we're a hard company to get in.
- Ours is jerky, jerky. Whoever is in charge of the area that needs the person drives the process. We try to make sure there's some objective test for the work they're expected to do. People can talk the talk without really having the hard skills to do the job.
 - The best thing we've done in welding is have the applicant assemble a part to a print. They have to read the print and perform the welds. It tells us so much!
 - The last step is supervisor who makes the decision, he/she decides if they would work well in our environment. No one wants to work with a jerk.
 - You can't always ferret out competency in an interview.
- We've never had a set process. When we needed to find a new designer, I put the word out on LinkedIn. I got tons of interviews with people who have their master's degrees. I'm sure they wouldn't have stayed at our company for 5 years.
 - I put the word out on INDEED. I did find an applicant who had knowledge of the software we use. He wasn't a genius on it, but that, plus the geographies of where he lived, was a plus.
- We have an HR department that is shared by the different divisions of our holding company.
 - Culture is a big deal for us. We use INDEED. We do a phone screen and a first interview with a senior leader. That senior manager walks the person through the core values. It's challenging to find people in the labor market we're in.
 - We've had a shortage of technicians for over a year. I talked to the local technical college and talked to the instructor. He invited me to come during orientation in and meet some of the students and the parents.
 - We invited the students and parents in for a lunch and learn - we had a few students show up and made the offer to two (one of whom failed the test) but the other was hired.
- Anybody want a job? That's how I hire.

- We hired our first woman welder who was great, but after a couple weeks she never showed up again.
- We first look through referrals and I found the welder replacement through a Craig's List ad.
- We have them do a weld test and come back. Bead is very important in our industry.
- I look for how long they've been at a place and their energy.
- We used to have a 2-step interview process; if we liked the candidate on the first interview, we'd bring them back for a second. That's out the window now, today applicants seem to have two other offers on the table when they come in. Now we give them a skills test on the first interview. If they pass that, we make the offer.
 - We're participating in the Skills USA program through the technical colleges. We pay the education expense for our interns. We recently hired our second intern.
- We advertise locally. We've tried to hire through an agency, but they can never quite find what we want.
 - If we attract someone, we bring them in. Usually the owners do the interviewing together. If the applicant meets our specifications, we give them a tour of the plant and describe the duties of the position.
- I've worked with a temp agency a couple different times on administrative positions; they screen applicants and two have turned into permanent jobs.
 - For the shop, we find candidates by word of mouth or advertising. We do a background check and if they're qualified, decide whether to make them an offer.

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Describe your onboarding process with new employees

- We have a checklist of all the paperwork that has to be completed. It covers training and goes over the job description. We cover the JHA (job hazard analysis). Then each new employee goes through safety videos (required by our insurance company) before they start working on the floor.
 - Next, the general manager brings the new employee to their work station and the training begins. Our onboarding process covers all the technical things they need to know.
 - I wish we had a mentor program; I would like to have someone work with each employee to instill our culture. (Manufacturing)
- We have five managers who do all the hiring and onboarding for their departments. Each new employee gets a packet of information to complete.
 - The majority of our employees are part time, so 80% of their success depends on them just showing up.
 - When I hire a new groundskeeper, I ask them to show up at 4:30 AM on their first day. We'll chat about the duties, what's expected of them. Then I tell them to go home and come back the next day to "officially" start their job. If they come back, we're pretty sure they'll make the cut.
 - We start the new employees at the bottom rung of tasks - bunker raking. Once they've mastered that, we move them to cup cutting and mowing greens. The most qualified people are working on greens.
 - We teach new people everything they need to know, from how to use a shovel to dig a trench, to how to drive a stick transmission.
- We're a small office with low turnover. Our secret to keeping good employees is taking the time to create a weekly checklist of what to go over each day.
 - Most of the learning curve is done through one-on-one training with different individuals in the organization. New people go out on sales calls, shadow others as they answer phone calls and respond to customer inquiries. They sit in on vendor meetings learning about the different products and services that we sell.
 - Our onboarding experience can best be described as learning by doing and osmosis!

- Our office manager does our onboarding; she's very detailed oriented and has a packet of information for everyone to fill out.
 - She goes through the POS (Point-of-sale) system first. Learning all our products takes a lot of time. She also covers the sales training that can be done on their own time.
 - Because we require employees to know all areas of the business, we have new hires shadow different employees for set periods of time. The office manager makes sure new hires are productive during their training and has them do small tasks while they're learning the ropes.

- We've recently updated our onboarding process. Our HR person works the co-general managers. The process has two parts:
 - What is required by law?
 - What the owners require the new team members to know about the company.
 - New team members come in a half hour later on their first day; this allows the managers to get their day set up before beginning the onboarding process. The first four hours are spent with HR, the second half of the day is spent with a co-general manager.
 - During their first week, they do an introductory walk around the plant three times with the general manager. The objective is to meet every team member and get a feel for the different departments and jobs.
 - Each new teammate is given a mentor and each mentor has a checklist of things to cover.
 - All team members have a 30-day probationary period after which we review each individual and make a decision as to whether they stay or not.

- We didn't have an onboarding process when I started the business. When we got more employees, we had the Team Handbook which covered the legal stuff. Then we had our own Retail Bible which covered information on everything we sold as well as the growing season of all the plants. We tried to lessen the learning curve and make them feel more comfortable.
 - The older employees really had a problem with sharing information, so our onboarding process was designed to go around them. I'm glad I sold that business.
 - Today I have one or two people and I don't have to do as much onboarding. However, we still have a binder with all the critical information such as phone numbers, passwords and logon information.

- We know as we grow, we'll have to become more formal, but for now our binder works. I also let employees know I'm available whenever they have questions or issues.
- I don't have any employees, so everyone's onboarded really well!!
 - I do, however, have contractors whom I work closely with. They are trained on our CRM program (Streak), set up with a Google Calendar and brought into our project management software, Trello. Subcontractors don't usually have a lot of systems and they appreciate learning new ones that will make them more effective.
 - Each is trained on the Trello boards, shown how to input activities, files, comments, checklists, and also trained on the calendar.
- Onboarding people in our company makes a huge difference in the success of the employee and how well they understand our culture. Getting hired is the first step of our relationship with new person and the onboarding is the second step.
 - We first show people around the office making sure we show them the lunch room, refrigerator, microwave, bathrooms and where office supplies are kept.
 - Next, we make sure they go to lunch with one of their co-workers. It's a bonding session.
 - Each new person meets one-on-one with me (the owner). I explain our core values and emphasize that we are interested and invest in their success. Because many of our employees have never been a salaried worker before, I go over what that means. I explain that we love to learn new things and that we are serious about learning and expect them to take some of the free on-line courses offered.
 - Every employee is issued a Quick Finder reference guide. It's an operations manual with all the critical numbers: police, alarm company, directions on how to get on our system remotely and every team member's name, hire date, phone number, etc. It even includes what to do if they get hurt on the job.
 - The owner personally checks in with them a couple of times a week during the first few weeks. It gives her the chance to see where they need more information and coach them along. It takes three months to get fully acclimated to our company.
- Each new employee gets a plant tour and is assigned a mentor (a peer who supports them socially, introduces them to different employees in the organizations and is there for them when they have questions.

- Every new employee meets one-on-one with the owner who, explains the company's core values and emphasizing that we are interested in their success.
- Because of the tight labor market, the onboarding process almost feels like step two of the interview.
 - We're a member of the Employer's Association and use the material they've developed to insure all our processes are legal and appropriate.
 - Each new hire is given a Company Handbook and each department head spends time with the person in the shop.
 - We try to team employees up with someone in the company to mentor them, but it's not a formal mentor program.
 - We explain EOS (Entrepreneurial Operating System - Traction) and go over our core values.
 - After 3 months, we take new employees out to lunch to see what how they're doing and to discover areas where we could improve.
- Our company is one of several businesses owned by a holding company. Corporate HR does most of the benefit orientation and covers the basics.
 - Next, the hiring manager goes over job responsibilities, gives a shop tour and introduces the new person to others.
 - We also do a cultural orientation. The CEO of the holding company does it in groups every two to three months. He spends 60 to 90 minutes talking about the company, our values and why we take them so seriously.
 - He also explains the keys to success and describes what it takes to be successful in our company.
- I do a terrible job of this and have had no experience in this area; we never had a formal process.
 - We hired an HR person recently, she makes sure all their forms are completed and that they get introduced to everyone in the company.
 - She does a 30 day and a 60 day sit down with new employees and shares what she's learned with the owners.
- Most of their first day on the job is me saying, "*Grab that shovel*"

- Seriously, we do the mandatory training, and I make sure the new person is introduced to everyone.
- We clarify what our business is and what we do. We've learned a lot of people assume they know what we do, but they're often wrong.
- I don't have a policy in place, because turnover is so low. Almost all my employees have been with me for a long time.
- We do a lot of different things, I start the new people out with the simplest jobs and a lot of guidance.
- Most of our employees are part time and long term. However, when we hire someone new, we give tours of the factory and we introduce them to all the employees.
 - If they're a full-time employee, we go over the benefits and time off and share the history of the company.
 - If they're temporary employees, the onboarding is more task orientated and they don't get the full-blown tour
- A little bit of hand-holding is required. We introduce all the employees and go over where things are kept and how to find information.
 - After that, we touch base every week / month / making sure the person understands why we do what we do and to answer any questions about the job and to clear up any misconceptions
- I see value in spending time with new employees. I walk new employees around the shop and share the story of how the company started.
 - You have to give as much information as possible in the beginning when they're still listening.
 - I clarify the job description and ask if they have any questions. After that, they're thrown in the fire.

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Do you do anything for holidays for your employees? What? Why or why not?

- They come to my house for dinner on Christmas Eve!
- Most of our people are laid off for the winter. We take the office staff to lunch and give the supervisors a gift card.
- We do a holiday themed pot luck on a Friday. We close our office from 11:00 to 1:00. We play the dice game and I buy and wrap gifts: crockpots, George Foreman grills, sets of dishes.
 - We implement a Secret Santa (3 weeks prior they get the name) they give a small gift and a larger one.
 - I usually give a utilitarian type gift, I gave a gray fleece logoed jacket this year. Since people in the office go in and out all the time and they're always borrowing umbrellas. Everyone got an umbrella this year too.
- We shut down the office at 2:00 and reserve a big table at a local restaurant and have a nice dinner. We only buy one beer.
- I helped a client host their party and purchased the gifts. It was a male dominated industry, it was fun to see the males get more feminine-type gifts.
 - This year I'm cohosting a party with another company.
- We used to do the whole big Christmas party and played games. One year an employee wrote a poem:

*“Merry Christmas to all,
wherever you roam,
you get us all drunk and
you send us on home.”*

- After that year we stopped the offsite parties. Now we do a Christmas dinner throughout the day (to accommodate three shifts) and lengthen the lunch hour on each shift.
- We also have an ugly sweater contest.
- We used to have a treat day close to the holidays, but we have so many young men that we ended up with a lot of bags of Doritos!
- This year we did something different. A customer has offered to make cutting boards out of our waste wood for each employee. We brought the customer in and introduced him to the employees. It was a great cooperative effort.
- We've always bought a gift. Life jacket, sweatshirt and logoed shirt.
- Our management team is 5 employees; we go to a nice restaurant sometime in December. The company buys everyone a nice meal and we exchange white elephant gifts. We have a lovely time at the end of the evening we hand out cash gifts.
- Bah Humbug!
 - We have a holiday party. We do a white elephant gift exchange. I give my employees gifts too.
 - We're doing an open house for my company and my husband's company (we're located in the same building.) After that we take all our employees to House of Pizza to play Bingo, afterwards we'll do a group tour of all the city lights.
- We've typically done a gift based on their years with us. The previous owner hated Christmas because he felt the employees expected something; they didn't view it as a gift.
 - When we were located downtown, we would pay for their parking permit as a gift. That changed when we moved and had free parking.
 - We do a secret Santa gift exchange with all the employees throughout December and have a pot luck lunch close to Christmas.
- I do cash bonuses and write a personal note.

- I only have one employee, I don't do much at Christmas. I try to give things throughout the year, so they have more impact.
 - One of my clients gave his administrative assistant twice-a-month house cleaning for a year. It cost him \$8,000; he said it was the best gift he ever gave and well worth the investment.

- We take all the employees out to dinner. We used to give out year-end bonuses. The employees expected them even when we hadn't had a profitable year. This year will be different.

- We're giving a Christmas bonus to everyone. We've had a good year; the employees will be happy. In the past we've had a party in a restaurant.
 - We try to get the bonuses out before Christmas if we can.

- We do a Christmas party. We did it the first few years on site and played the dice game. People wanted something different, so we went off site. The problem with that is we don't get 100% participation. Now we have an Employment Engagement Committee that figures out what we'll do for the holidays.
 - This year the CEO gave everyone a \$100 bill on Thanksgiving.

- We have a pot luck every year. We used to go off site, but when we grew to over 100 employees it got hard.

- There's a lot of effort that goes into the holidays!
 - Every employee (175) gets a full Christmas dinner.
 - We do a Christmas party in January and we give away a lot of stuff (gift cards, electronics, travel vouchers).
 - Historically the company gave out Christmas bonus, but last year we gave them out a little before Christmas and when we closed the year, the CFO discovered we didn't have as profitable a year as we thought. Oops!

- We run 24/7 - 4 shifts; it's impossible to get everyone together without shutting the company down.
 - This year we opted to take funds dedicated for the Christmas party and gave people a bonus. We like to give it before black Friday, the employees loved that!
 - We'll also hand out a performance bonus this year.
 - Next Thursday, we have a pot luck for all shifts

- I buy a whole bunch of cool electronics on Cyber Monday and hold drawings for them close to Christmas. I walk around and give turkeys to everyone. We also go out to dinner and allow employees to bring a guest. (In the summer we have a party and encourage employees to bring their children.)

- We do food boxes of unique things - this year we put together things sold at the St. Paul Farmer's Market. Each box is beautiful and worth around \$100.
 - We will have an employee dinner, but it might not be until after New Year's Day. Christmas is always busy season for us, everyone is working 12 to 13-hour days.

- We have a holiday potluck on the Friday before Christmas, and I give everyone a bonus.
 - This year everyone will be off on Christmas Eve (the entire day), which is a treat for them because we've been so busy. We try to give people the opportunity to be off more around the holidays as workload allows.

Acknowledgements

2018 was a year of learning from each other, engaging in conversations that mattered and growing our collective wisdom.

Thank you for your candidness, willingness to share and for being brave and asking questions.

“You Can’t know about things you have yet to discover.” Jonathan Raymond.

Name	Business
John Thibado	Advanced Extrusion
Casey Porkkonen	AgVenture Feed & Seed, Inc.
Corey Linn	Arete Enterprising
Tony Ross	Astro Engineering
Kittie Fenlason	Blackberry Ridge Golf Course & Event Center
Wes Fenlason	Blackberry Ridge Golf Course & Event Center
Tia Ott	Bobco Systems
Eric Gustafson	Branch Landscaping
Alan Lawinger	Centre Pallet, Inc.
Andy Larson	Custom Automation
Eileen Eichten Carlson	Eichten Hidden Acres
Jill Magelssen	Express Employment Pros
Lynn Johnson	Facility Sourcing Direct
Courtney Blonigen	Gruber’s Quilt Shop
Mary Jo Harris	Harris Hard Woods
Sharon Sorenson	Heartland Organizing
Brenda Eisenschenk	InteleCONNECT
Jackie Bach	M. Lavine Design & Workshop
Bob Thompson	Minpack, Inc.
Paul Gauerke	North Central Bus & Equipment
Peter Nora	P N Products
Perry Lindberg	Perry’s Auto Salon
Deb Colling	Professional Learning Alternatives
Ryan Plath	Premier Powder Coating
Rocky Thompson	RTO (Ritters Thompson Olson)
Randy Schmitz	Rolling Ridge Wedding & Event Center
Brian Donahue	Safety Speed Manufacturing
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