

The 2017 Dakota-Scott Workforce Summit

Dakota-Scott

Overview describing the innovative practice

Where do you find your best applicants? How can you keep the employees you have? What tools are available to you? Where are the hidden talent pools? Those were the key topics drawing more than 120 people to the first annual 2017 Dakota-Scott Workforce Summit.

The first Dakota-Scott Workforce Summit held in October 2017 put those questions on the table and provided attendees with “hidden gem” resources to help them overcome their workforce-related challenges. The brainchild of the Dakota-Scott Workforce Development Board’s (WDB) business services committee, the Summit was designed to be an event for employers which would provide practical, take-home information to help them with employee recruiting and retention challenges.

The robust agenda included:

- A labor market overview from Tim O’Neill, Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development;
- A keynote presentation from Traci and Lori Tapani, Co-Presidents, Wyoming Machine;
- Business panel discussions with representatives from small and large organizations with innovative approaches to retaining and attracting employees;
- Breakout sessions on Employee Attraction, Employee Retention, Apprenticeships/Internships, and Disabilities;
- A wrap-up presentation by Gerry Hoeffner, Personnel Dynamics Consulting;
- And presentation of the “Employers of Excellence” Awards.

The half-day event was a huge success. Attendees heard from outstanding speakers, participated in a variety of workshops, and were able to meet with numerous exhibitors - all of whom had potential solutions for employers’ workforce related challenges.

Mark Lofthus, Planning Committee Co-Chair, notes, “The 2017 Workforce Summit was the first large scale opportunity for employers in Dakota and Scott counties to convene – now that the workforce shortage is in full bloom and unemployment is reaching historic lows – to consider with their peers how they can find new solutions to address their common problems. The answers, it became clear, are as multi-faceted as the businesses who make up our south metro community. Integrated with the announcement of the ‘Employers of Excellence’ awards, the Summit provides a means to recognize the employers who objectively are doing the best and spurring their peers to do even better.”

Jobseeker impact (i.e.: benefits, outcomes for jobseekers)

Key benefits for jobseekers with this event were increasing the awareness of employers to the variety of public resources available to connect with them and retain and/or train them once they were employed. One of the key take-aways for every attendee was a three-page “Workforce Summit Resource Guide” which included information and contacts for Adult Basic Education, Apprenticeships, Corrections Programs, Customized Training, High School Career and Internship Programs, Hiring Events at WorkForce Centers, Hiring People With Disabilities, Older Workers, Talent Attraction, Transit, Veterans and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit and Federal Bonding programs. Many of these resources had key go-to information to help employers connect with job seekers.

Job seekers also benefitted from the advice of Lori and Traci Tapani, Co-Presidents of Wyoming Machine, who told the audience that the solutions to their workforce problems were right in front of their noses and then proceeded to tell about the innovative, yet simple, approaches they’ve taken to attract and retain employees. Those examples include: hiring a person who was working at McDonalds and their success hiring a homeless person who is now a supervisor within the company. 100% of the people who responded to a post-event survey rated their presentation as “great.”!

Additionally, the breakout sessions on employee attraction, retention, apprenticeships/internships and disabilities provided attendees with real-world success stories from peers and great information about the entities, resources and tools available to help employers.

Employer/Community impact (i.e.: benefits, outcomes for non-jobseekers)

“As a member of the Workforce Development Board and an HR professional in Dakota County, I want to see the businesses in our local area thrive and succeed. One of their biggest challenges is attracting and retaining talent. The Workforce Summit allowed businesses time to pause and focus their attention on these challenges while providing inspiring speakers and local resources to help them,” said Pam Oeffler, Committee Co-Chair.

The primary audience for the Workforce Summit was employers. While many noted the value of learning about area resources and programs, the post-event feedback noted highest ratings for the three sets of speakers including Tim O'Neill, the Tapanis, and Gerry Hoeffner. Hoeffner talked about best practices of employers as he's seen in his work with Employers of Excellence/Best Places to Work programs throughout the country. His message about working with generational differences and the challenges created by "back-loading" benefits such as vacations generated a lot of conversation with employers. At least one attendee modified their benefit package based on Hoeffner's keynote. Other changes attendees noted they planned on pursuing included "incorporating more employee initiatives (i.e. online suggestion box, free food, etc." Another noted that they would, "look broader at transferable skills a person brings to the position."

When asked what they enjoyed most about the Workforce Summit, comments from attendees included:

- *"I like hearing about what other companies are doing to attract and retain employees and their best practices."*
- *"The break-out session on disabilities."*
- *"The Tapani sisters' examples of real-world experience recruiting and hiring talent."*
- *"Learning the different sources to recruit from."*
- *"The 2017 Workforce Summit had two inspiring keynote speakers that gave me fresh ideas on how to meet the challenges of a tight labor market. Plus, I learned about local resources and organizations that I didn't even know existed."*

Employers also played a very important role in the overall program as many were part of the agenda. Please see the list in the next section for a list of participating organizations

Finally, one key component of the luncheon was the presentation of the Employers of Excellence awards to nine local employers. The Employers of Excellence survey collects data based on 37 different measurements to produce a 20-page report on employment trends and practices in Dakota and Scott counties. From the data, the WDB recognizes the employers that are experiencing the best results in employee retention efforts and providing the best work environments in the area.

Identification of those involved, including collaborators

The WDB, in its entirety, was key in supporting and promoting the event. The planning and design of the Workforce Summit was driven by Dakota-Scott WDB members Mark Lofthus, Pam Oeffler, Vicki Stute, Jack Phillips, Claire Giancola-Belmares, Gail Morrison, Gloria Fatze, and WDB Business Services Committee member Skip Nienhaus. Part of the beauty of this planning team is that they brought a range of perspectives which was extremely valuable in determining the Summit agenda and content. The committee met 1 to 2 times a month throughout the planning process.

Other collaborators/participants included the following area employers who served on either the business panel or the breakout sessions: Smead Mfg., Banker's Equipment Service, MRCI WorkSource, UTC Aerospace Systems, CHS, Skyline Exhibits, Living Well Disabilities, Dakota County Technical College, Inver Hills Community College, Paychex, Custom Drapery and Blinds, Carlson Capital Management, Valley Natural Foods, Department of Employment and Economic Development, MN Department of Labor and Industry, Fairview Health Services, Uponor - North America, ProAct Inc., Supermom's and Andeavor, MN Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and HyVee.

Leveraging/alignment of outside resources

Numerous outside resources were used including:

- Dakota County Regional Chamber of Commerce which handled registrations;
- Most of the local Chambers of Commerce and City Community/Economic Development Directors who helped promote the Employers of Excellence program and Workforce Summit;
- Best Western Hotel, Burnsville - site of the event;
- The four sponsors: Dakota County Community Development Agency, Scott County Community Development Agency, Inver Hills Community College, Dakota County Technical College;
- The Dakota County Communications department which helped publicize the event;
- The 20+ non-profits, schools, and other organizations who exhibited resource tables and were available to speak with attendees;
- Gerry Hoeffner, Personnel Dynamics, who owns the Employer of Excellence Program and was a keynote speaker.

Ideas for replication/lessons learned:

An event of this magnitude takes a lot of planning. Start early! Have a really smart planning team like our WDB did. Know "why" having the event is important. Figure out what will attract people to attend. As part of the agenda, have other businesses share their successes and insights. Decide whether or not you want to charge attendees to attend. Deliver on what you promise. Promote, promote, promote.