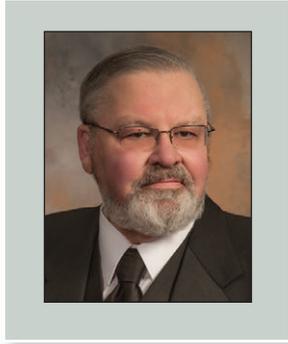


► PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



David E. Riggs,
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As I put the finishing touches on last month's column discussing the future of the environmental health profession and professional, I had the feeling that what the professional brings to the practice of environmental health is only half of the equation. The other half of the equation is the role and responsibilities of seasoned practitioners and supervisors, as well as agencies and organizations, in recruiting, developing, and retaining talented entry and midlevel environmental health personnel.

The environmental health workforce is gray-ing with a significant number of baby boomers retiring at an astonishing rate, especially in the areas of technical, field, and midlevel management. The recruitment of talented and skilled professionals is of the greatest importance to employers in local, state, and federal agencies, as well as industry. Even as the environmental health workforce is retiring, the pool of qualified entry-level environmental health professionals is insufficient to meet the needs for public, nonprofit, and industry employers. It is our responsibility to properly recruit and retain personnel with the talent and skills to ensure organizational success.

Talent and skills are becoming the newest and highest priorities employers consider in hiring entry-level and midmanagement professionals. For environmental health professionals, technical knowledge is a given. Today's intricate and dynamic workplace demands that employers strongly consider the potential employee's character and indicators of future performance during recruitment. The successful organization is constantly searching for the right skills and temperament. The search for

Search and Employ

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the right employee with the appropriate technical knowledge, skills, talent, and character is now more important than ever.

Although the recruitment of talented and creative employees is an important start in developing a successful and viable environmental health organization, it is only the first step. Skilled and talented environmental health practitioners will increasingly gravitate toward employers that create a workplace that promotes creativity, innovation, education, and professional and personal advancement. The best talent in our profession will be attracted to organizations that provide work experiences rather than jobs. The successful employer will provide challenges that are rewarding and meaningful. New employees want to be engaged and appreciated.

There are three generations in the labor market right now: baby boomers, Generation X, and millennials. In addition, a fourth generation is due to come into the mainstream workforce in 6 to 10 years. This diversity is

changing the relationship between employers and employees.

The workforce will become one in which challenge, opportunity, and empowerment set the parameters in careers that will attract the best and brightest. Employees will no longer be tied to a particular employer. The loyalties of millennials and Generation X are not to employers, but rather to the leaders who can offer work environments proportional to their career goals. What further complicates the picture is the reality that environmental health (in fact, all of government) is in competition for these talented individuals. It also means it is time for environmental health to offer compensation levels that are commensurate with the challenges we offer to our environmental health professionals.

Now to the point of this message. The supply of talented, skilled, knowledgeable, and competent environmental health practitioners is limited. In response, the successful employer not only must hire talented, capable, and competent environmental health practitioners with technical backgrounds, but also provide an employment environment that encourages the development of professional capabilities.

Professional capability development is not a new term, however, the application to environmental health is a fascinating and exciting prospect. As it becomes more and more difficult to attract experienced people, changes in how to develop and retain environmental health professionals will be implemented. This change will require workforce leaders to better recognize and promote the skills and knowledge needed to be successful in

our profession. The organization that develops and implements systems for promoting individual and professional growth, as well as rewards experience and responsibility, will find its retention rates higher and turnover rates lower. Even more important, the organization will find its employees more satisfied with the workplace.

I can see all of our agencies and companies recruiting the most talented and competent

personnel. Once we recruit the best individuals, it becomes our responsibility to develop workplace experiences that promote professional growth. Our workforce, in general, and millennials and Generation X, specifically, value meaningful and rewarding work environments. A successful organization invests in the development of an innovative and creative work environment.

In the end, these are principles NEHA can use to take the lead in developing programs and systems for environmental health practitioners and organizations to apply to promote competency and skill sets now and for the future. 🐘

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2017

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