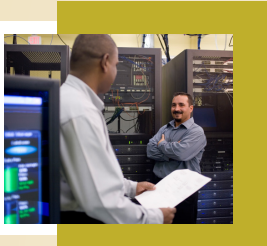


American Express Hiring Smart, Training Smarter



“The American Express brand is all about extraordinary service, and hiring to that high standard is the most important investment we can make in our brand.”

Jeanette Harrison
Chief Learning Officer
American Express

After a few years of high attrition rates and money spent on training employees who ultimately left the company after a short period of time, American Express had to “step back and take a look at the learning landscape” as it pertained to reading comprehension and basic computing math skills among its new hires.

■ Hiring at the Right Skill Level

“We learned we were hiring employees who couldn’t read or perform basic math functions, let alone the more complex math-based tasks we needed them to deliver,” said Jeanette Harrison, the chief learning officer at American Express and vice president of the company’s Learning Network. “We did in-depth assessments of exactly what was needed to do customer service at our high standard and then created a very specific, detailed hiring profile so that we could begin hiring for the right skill level.”

American Express’ customer care division is 15,000 employees strong and is responsible for assisting American Express card members and merchants with needs ranging from processing new accounts to card remittance.

American Express does not conduct remedial training for its service employees. Instead, it made the corporate decision to hire employees who are ready to work.

As a result, its 12-week training period focuses on preparing every new hire to be fully ready to work independently on the job.

The company also increased its pay scale to be able to compensate these higher-skilled employees.

■ A Solid Foundation

The company’s new hiring profile ensures that every employee starts work with proven competencies in math and computing skills, reading and retention skills, as well as the ability to locate and communicate technical information in a complex environment.

Human resource staff members also evaluate a potential employee’s aptitude for teamwork and communications skills, as well as their overall attitude about work.

“This country has got to wake up and do something, because we’re approaching a crisis level.”

Jeanette Harrison

■ Focused Training

By hiring in this manner, the company operates in a more cost-effective manner because it can ensure that its training budgets are focused on ongoing employee development and career advancement opportunities. On average, every employee in the company’s service division spends 60 hours per year on career development training and opportunities.

“Our service employees absolutely have to have the capacity to absorb and work with complex technical, service, financial and

legal challenges, so it's important that we hire people who are already at a level where we don't have to go back and re-educate on the basics they should have already learned in school," added Harrison.

"We're not investing in remediation," said Harrison, who believes the school systems in America have failed students by not adequately preparing them for the workplace. "This country has got to wake up and do something, because we're approaching a crisis level."

About American Express

www.americanexpress.com

American Express Company is a leading global payments, network and travel company founded in 1850.

About Corporate Voices for Working Families

Corporate Voices for Working Families is the leading national business membership organization representing the private sector on public and corporate policy issues involving working families. A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, we improve the lives of working families by developing and advancing innovative policies that reflect collaboration among the private sector, government and other stakeholders.

Find Out More

Publications, research studies and toolkits on a host of workforce readiness, flexibility, family economic stability, and work and family balance issues are available on the Corporate Voices Web site at www.corporatevoices.org.

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