

FIRST PERSON

By Jennifer J. Laabs

Strategic Holiday Staffing at Lands' End

In the middle of a 40-acre snow-covered cornfield in rural Wisconsin, Lands' End is at the height of its holiday season. As a direct-mail merchant of clothing and sewn goods, Lands' End's work force swelled from 4,500 workers to more than 6,500 during November and December.

As the employment manager, Diane Huza is responsible for overseeing the recruitment of more than 2,000 seasonal and temporary employees who will make the company successful each holiday season. It's a big job. But through advance planning and help from managers and supervisors, Huza, a six-year veteran of the holiday mail-order wars, makes sure the staffing needs are covered. Here, Huza discusses how an organization with more than \$734 million in sales meets its staffing needs during the busiest time of the year.

How does your company staff up for the holidays?

We really plan for it. We start in January looking at the projections as far as the amount of orders that we're planning on having, and then based on those numbers we're able to determine how many people it will take us to get the orders out the door. Managers turn in their projections for temporary hire needs by about the first of March. By that time, we have our ad plan in place, we work with a budget, then we determine where we want to place our ad, and then look at any other special recruitment programs that we might want to do for the year. And it's not as if those of us in HR make all of the decisions. The managers and myself develop those plans so everybody has a buy-in and everybody feels committed to what we're going to be doing for the holiday season.

When you say you start in January, you're talking about planning for the following November and December?

We start in January looking at what we're planning on having for sales the following November and December. Actually, [the managers] have already prepared their budgets prior to that and have made

changes in their plan as far as how many regular [employees] they will have in their departments and that impacts how many temporaries we need to hire. Are there new centers starting up? Are we going to be implementing any new programs that might impact the number of temporaries that we are hiring? How is the work going to change going forward? They submit their plans to me by about March 1 as to the number of people that they need. Then what we try to do is work with them to see if there are any other options as far as getting the work done rather than just hiring a lot of people. We're committed to having the people that work here have the poten-

How many locations does your company operate from?

We have our Dodgeville location, which includes our main distribution center, our customer sales area and all of the support departments. That's where you would find our merchandising group and our creative group and a large portion of our HR group. We have our cross-claims forms center [there]. And we just added a new distribution center in Reedsburg.

Is Dodgeville a small community?

It's a small community. There are about 4,000 people here. It's very friendly. We have a nice downtown area with nice shops and stores. When people come to visit Lands' End, I think that they feel like our community really welcomes them. I think of Dodgeville as Lands' End's home, yet my recruitment really is within a 30-mile radius. All of the small communities around us have the same friendly, nice people.



We always get the people we need to get the work done, and it's never in desperation.

*Diane Huza
Lands' End*

tial to earn as much money as they can during the holiday season without having them get overly exhausted, rather than hiring a lot of people. A lot of companies just hire so many people and do they really need all those people?

In which areas of the business do you hire people during the holidays?

In the telephone ordering area, we call it customer sales. We have packers and order fillers. We also have a department that takes care of our mail orders. We also do customization of items, like hemming and monogramming and those areas also need to staff up. We do gift boxing, that has to staff up. And the number of catalogues that we send out from our Dodgeville location increases during our holiday season, so the majority of areas need to staff up.

What's the number of core workers?

We have temporaries all year long. During our holiday season, about half of our employees are regular employees; that would include all of our salaried staff also. Then about half are temporary employees. We keep temporaries all year because our business fluctuates within the year, within the month and also within a given week. We really need to have ongoing temporary employees to help with those peaks.

Do you have difficulties recruiting the large numbers of people you need?

I would say that every year it's a challenge. But I believe that every company that's trying to hire a lot of people would consider it a challenge. Somehow or another, we're always able to meet our need. We've always gotten the people that we need to get the work done and it's

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never in desperation, it's always planned. And as we get near to the end of the hiring season, then people start to get to be a little bit more concerned, because it does take a lot of effort on the part of the managers and supervisors to interview all of these people and then train them.

How do you recruit these temporaries generally?

Well, we have several different areas that we look at for recruitment. We have what we call our internal recruitment programs, and that would be things such as our referral programs, where employees can earn dollars for referring people that they feel would be good employees here at Lands' End. That's a very strong program here. Then we also have programs such as job share and extended schedules. Job share is where a person is trained to work in more than one department. So let's say, for instance, a customer-sales rep might do customer sales three days a week and then work in customer service for two days a week, so they're actually working in more than one department. That way, we're able to maximize the use of our employees and not have to hire as many, plus the employee can maximize his or her earning potential to the best of their ability. I think that's important. When you have a business that has all these peaks and valleys, how do you help people have a steady income? Also during our holiday season, some departments use what we call extended schedules where a person can work up to 12 hours in a given day, but they cannot work in one department for 12 hours. It allows our employees to have an additional part-time job.

That's a better use of staff than it would be to just hire more external temporaries for the holidays.

Right. Our employees were wanting to earn additional dollars for the holidays, and we didn't feel that it was efficient to have one person doing the same job for 10 hours or more. It would be much more efficient for the person to have a change in what they are doing.

Do you have a big influx of temporaries that you've never worked with also during the holidays?

Yes. We have our internal recruitment that we were talking about, and then we

have our external recruitment program. We develop a very nice ad program [each year] and our ad programs focus on our vision statement and customer service here at Lands' End. We try to highlight the different jobs so people have the opportunity to say to themselves as they're looking at the ads, "Well, I think I can do this job." We do a smattering of radio ads, and those are only when we're really hiring at our peak. We also try to partner with the local high schools, universities and the technical colleges. One of the things that we're trying to do is make sure that we help make

VITALS

COMPANY

Lands' End, Inc.

INDUSTRY

International direct merchant of clothing and sewn goods

LOCATION

Dodgeville, Wisconsin

NAME

Diane Huza

TITLE

Employment manager

YOU SHOULD KNOW

Founded in 1963, Lands' End initially supplied sailboat hardware and equipment by mail. In 1976, the company decided to focus its efforts on selling clothing and soft luggage. By 1979, Lands' End had moved to Dodgeville, Wisconsin, expanded its clothing selection and began to recruit personnel experienced in the area of fabrics and clothing manufacturing.

the students successful in their studies as well as working here. We have a strong commitment that we don't want to see our [seasonal] employees [who are students] fail in their other commitments such as other jobs that they might have or their studies. So we've started to meet with the local high schools, universities and technical colleges on a more regular basis to talk about how we can recruit their students as employees and [ask them] about some of the things that are happening with their students. I think we offer some really nice schedules. The commitment is a six-hour

shift in the evening if you're trying to go to school, vs. trying to work an eight-hour shift after you've finished with a full day of school. We only ask for a commitment of three shifts a week. Most students are able to handle 18 hours a week and still maintain their study schedule.

So you give them an opportunity while also trying to not overburden them?

Absolutely. Some of the schools are a fair distance away and transportation might be a roadblock. We've started to do some busing from those locations. We just pick up students at the school and then bring them here for a six-hour shift and then take them back. That's working really well. We've just started that this year.

How many of the seasonal employees return each year?

About one-third.

Is that high for your industry?

I consider that about average. The reason that I think it's average is that we do lose some of our rehires because we hire a large student population for our second shift. Then once they graduate, many of them move out of the area, so they're not available. But what we do find is that employees might work for us two or three years, then stop for some reason and come back two or three years later. They always seem happy and excited to come back. So we don't just look at our rehires as people who have just worked the previous season. Anyone who has worked for us in the past, we consider to be of extra value to us.

What have you learned about recruitment and how to find the right kind of people for your organization?

At Lands' End we have always had the philosophy that every hire is a potential regular employee. So when we're doing our interviewing and we're looking at people, we take the same interest in that person as we would in someone who's going to be a regular hire because my intention is that they'll work for us for more than just the holiday season. Our intention is that they will be an ongoing temporary or come back to us season after season. I look for people with a good customer-service attitude—no matter what job you do at Lands' End, you're going to be impacting the customer.

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Can you describe the orientation and training that you put your temporary and seasonal workers through?

All of our new employees receive a six-hour orientation. Then as a rehire, we update them on new things that have happened at the company. That's usually a two-hour program. Each department has very specific training programs.

Do rehires go through training every year?

If their break of employment has been less than a year, then the training would be minimal. But if it has been more than a year, then they would go through what we call a rehire training program, so it's more formal. It's pretty much categorized by how people come back [to us]. We have our new-hire groups, we have our rehire groups and then we have those people who just continuously come back every year, because you certainly don't want to have someone who is ready and anxious to get on the job spending a lot of time reviewing information that they don't need.

Your company is known for excellent customer service. How do you measure and reward temps and seasonal people for good customer service?

Customers write tons of letters to us about our employees. So we post all of those and we take [employees'] pictures and hang them up for everyone to see. Our vision statement here at Lands' End is a driving force. Everyone here is working for customer service. Each of the departments has standards of accuracy, standards of the amount of work that they need to do in a given period of time for efficiency, and we're always looking for new ideas on how we can improve things. We have a program called "Team Squared." Team Squared is a process-improvement program where employees can share their ideas on how we can improve how we're doing things for our customer service, all in relationship to our vision statement. We don't have an employee of the year or an employee of the month because it's happening every minute here. That's just our goal here, how we operate.

How do you make it fun during the holiday times for all of the employees?

We have an activity center here at Lands' End and they have a lot of different

programs that are going on there. As a company, we have the kids from Wisconsin come for an evening and they do two shows and we have cookies and it's very festive. Our whole Lands' End [campus] is decorated to a tee for our holiday season. We also have, as a company, a Christmas Choir that employees can volunteer to participate in. It's just gorgeous. And they go around from department to department caroling. We ask one of the local high schools to come in each year and do a mini concert during our lunch breaks. Those are things that we do as a company.

appreciation day. Everyone who was working that day put their name into a hat and they drew every half hour and then they had this little Hawaiian [island] all set up—with the lawn chair and palm tree—and they gave the winner a Hawaiian shirt and a Hawaiian hat to put on and took their picture. Then that person could draw out of a hat for a prize. The prize might be getting to select which particular job they would be doing in that department for the next couple of days. We also had a holiday sweater day where everyone wore holiday sweaters.



To keep spirits up during the hectic holidays, employees at Lands' End play games. These workers in the training department wore garments from the Christmas catalog and trainees had to recall their item numbers and prices from memory. From left to right: Diane Smith-Hole, Gail Morkemo, Marla Rielly, Sheri Breuer, Linda Bishcoff, Sandy Reynolds, Cindy Leix, Maribeth Weier and Ju Lee McConnell.

What do you do in each department to make it fun?

Each of the departments has the freedom to do things that they want to do—a department like customer sales has a whole calendar of events that they're doing. One of the events that they might do would be to play a states game. As the telephone operators are taking orders, they keep track of which states have called and they check them off. Then at the end of the day or whatever the timeline is, everyone turns theirs in and then there's a drawing for a prize. The order-filling department in the distribution center had an order-filler

We also have wellness ambassadors here—they link the activities center to the departments. We often take advantage of the wellness ambassadors for help in planning some of these fun events in the departments. And we try to get a group of employees together and let them come up with a plan rather than just having it be the supervisors who are doing the planning. It's more fun that way. ■

Jennifer J. Laabs is the senior writer at PERSONNEL JOURNAL.

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