

# The Other Kind of Business Intelligence

Now more than ever, staffing and recruiting professionals are pursuing the best professional development opportunities the industry has to offer—and it's having a profound effect.

*By Glenn Cook*

Every day, executives at the nation's leading staffing and recruiting companies keep tabs on economic news, industry news, the latest trends and data—all in a relentless effort to be the best-informed and edge out the competition. Those who succeed are not only persistent, they also have a layer of business intelligence that goes much deeper than spreadsheets and metrics.

That kind of business intelligence is rooted in a company culture that makes continuous learning, professional development, and training a corporate priority. It's a strategy that's also been shown to have a positive effect on retention rates, recruitment efforts, employee morale, productivity, and overall operational excellence. And with industry sales continuing on an upward trend and markets getting increasingly tighter, savvy companies will capitalize on their commitment to executive education and staff development and training.

And it's a strategy that's not lost on clients.

"Our clients understand that there's value in continuously improving and investing in your employees," says Adam Hatcher, CSP, general counsel of Augusta, GA-based MAU Workforce Solutions. "Clients expect that level of excellence from their staffing company. When they're working with a great workforce solutions firm, that firm should be ensuring the excellence of its employees, too."



Hatcher is, of course, an ASA Certified Staffing Professional®—one of four industry professional credentials bestowed by the American Staffing Association. He is one of more than 7,000 industry professionals who has earned an ASA credential since the association's certification program launched in 2004.

But back then—even as recent as it may seem—the industry had a predominantly different outlook on the value of professional development and training. A high turnover rate among staffing professionals, particularly among those in the early stages of their careers, meant staffing company leaders were less inclined to invest in professional development and training.

“When we were first introducing the value of lifelong learning to staffing professionals, we were fighting against a mentality in which owners did not want to invest in training out of a fear that the staff would be recruited to work for other companies once they received their professional credentials,” says Tracy

Rettie, CAE, vice president of education and chapter relations for ASA. “I’ve seen that outlook change over the years, because now they really see the value they get from investing in and developing their staff and management teams. The industry as a whole benefits when everyone is learning.”

And while the estimated turnover rate among internal employees at staffing firms has hovered around 25%, the participation rate in ASA certification programs, webinars, and professional development and networking events like the ASA Staffing Law Conference and Staffing World® continues on an upward trajectory—and the association has worked hard to keep the offerings timely, valuable, and relevant as the industry continues to evolve.

That means new and enhanced certification programs, a full schedule of webinars that can also stream live on mobile devices, frequently updated industry-specific employment law textbooks and ebooks, new video study tools, updated online exams, resources specific to the Affordable Care

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—Jim Clifton, Gallup

Act—and those are just a few examples of how industry professionals are getting the kind of business intelligence that drives success, growth, and overall operational excellence.

Here’s a strategic look at how forward-thinking staffing companies—led by executives who see the value professional development brings to their firms—are getting out ahead of the competition and making sure they stay ahead.

### **Creating the Staffing Elite**

As Rettie notes, the industry as a whole has been experiencing a steady sea change when it comes to investing in professional development and certification programs—even in the last several years. Now, instead of staffing companies being hesitant about getting their employees certified, many have made certification a requirement of employment.

That’s the case at Atlanta-based Hire Dynamics, where Jeannette Blake, CSP, started her staffing career as an account manager more than 15 years ago. Blake says that before ASA certification programs entered the industry picture, it was very close to being a sink-or-swim environment. In some cases, she says, “There was no training. You either got it or you didn’t. You had to use your natural instinct and personality to survive in this field.”

Today, Hire Dynamics spends \$300,000 annually on professional development and training and the company continues to increase that amount as it expands nationally. All employees who have been with Hire Dynamics for at least 12 months are required to earn ASA credentials.

“It’s important for the company as well as the industry as a whole for staffing professionals to be experts in their field,” says Dan Campbell, CSP, chief executive officer of Hire Dynamics. Campbell notes that investing in education for your internal staff also fuels company growth goals.

“As rewarding as it is, the staffing business can be a complicated one, too,” says Campbell. “Those who are well-versed in employment law, co-employment issues, regulations under the Affordable Care Act, candidate screening, workplace safety, and all those topics that are part of operating a staffing firm are best prepared to interact with clients and talent. Someone who is ASA-certified is also a better salesperson, talent advocate, and account manager.”

### **Becoming Consultative Partners**

MAU Workforce Solutions also expects its employees to earn credentials from ASA—and they predominantly earn the CSP. As the company’s general counsel and a CSP, Hatcher has a unique perspective on the credential’s value as it pertains to the legal issues facing the staffing industry, and how earning the CSP addresses those issues in daily business operations.

“I could call an outside counsel and ask him one question about one narrow issue, and he could talk to me for less than an hour and charge me more than it would cost to buy, generally, one Certified Staffing Professional certification,” Hatcher says. “That certification covers every issue. I could pay the same amount for one topic with no reference material, or get all the topics relevant to our industry in an easy-to-digest format and reference books.”

The certification packages for the CSP and the Technical Services Certified<sup>SM</sup> credentials are the association’s most in-demand educational offerings. In addition to new video learning modules released this year, newly revised workbooks, state-specific materials, and online exams, these packages include the industry’s authoritative go-to reference textbooks: *Employment Law for Staffing Professionals* (13th edition) and *Co-Employment: Employment Liability Issues in Third-Party Staffing Arrangements* (8th

## **New ASA Certification Program Targets the Health Care Sector**



Certified Health Care Staffing Professional<sup>SM</sup>

Staffing and recruiting professionals working in the health care sector now have the opportunity to truly differentiate themselves in this increasingly competitive staffing industry vertical.

In June, ASA launched the Certified Health Care Staffing Professional<sup>SM</sup> program. Developed by a team of attorneys, leading staffing firms serving the health care sector, and professional development specialists, **the new CHP<sup>SM</sup> credential is by far the most comprehensive and sector-specific credential available to industry professionals right now.** In addition to content specific to the CHP online exam, the CHP package includes the new editions of *Employment Law for Staffing Professionals* and *Co-Employment: Employer Liability Issues in Third-Party Staffing Arrangements*. (See the sidebar “Industry-Best Certification Programs Roll Out Anew” on page 20.)

Learn more about the new CHP certification program at [americanstaffing.net/CHP](http://americanstaffing.net/CHP). Questions? Contact Emily Lawson, senior manager, education and certification, at [elawson@americanstaffing.net](mailto:elawson@americanstaffing.net) or 703-253-1145.

edition). Soon these textbooks, also updated in 2015, will be available as ebooks, too—for Kindle, Nook, and Apple and Android devices, making it even easier for busy professionals to study and reference these “bibles” of the industry wherever they are. (See the sidebar “Industry-Best Certification Programs Roll Out Anew” on page 20.)

ASA-certified professionals maintain their credentials by participating in a wide range of continuing education offerings throughout the year, and doing so ensures that they are staying ahead of changing regulations, compliance issues, and industry trends. Because if there’s one thing this industry is well-known for it’s constant change, says Campbell. And keeping up with that change can at times be as convenient as tuning into a one-hour webinar on recruiting strategies, marketing trends, or ACA-related updates. (See the sidebar “Free Webinars, Free App, Big Rewards” on this page.)

Hatcher says having ASA-certified professionals on the company’s internal staff means MAU employees are much more than just providers of staffing services; they become consultative partners for MAU’s clients. They can provide a higher, more authoritative level of service, and that enhanced service results in enhanced relationships that keep clients coming back.

“Clients want an understanding of their entire workforce, contract as well as their own workforce, and we’re able to see issues in their contract workforce they would never see because our people have those certifications,” explains Hatcher.

### Keeping Pace With Growth

“More people are working in a temporary and contract capacity in the U.S. than ever before—our industry is growing,” says Robin Mee, president of Mee Derby & Co., a Washington, DC-based search and recruiting firm.

The industry data easily back Mee’s point. U.S. staffing companies employed an average of 3.2 million temporary and contract workers per week in 2014, up 5.4% from 2013, according to data released in March by ASA. In the fourth quarter of 2014, average weekly staffing industry employment grew by 137,100 workers—4.2% more than in the third quarter.

And with a steady increase in demand and sales comes the need for efficient and knowledgeable internal employees who feel invested and engaged



## Free Webinars, Free App, Big Rewards

It almost seems too good to be true—year-round, round-the-clock, mobile-friendly, high-quality, industry-specific professional development offerings from the most authoritative organization in the staffing, recruiting, and workforce solutions business.

**ASA produces nearly 50 live webinars throughout the year, all of which are available free of charge to member companies.** Plus, hundreds of ASA On-Demand webinars are available on the association’s website. A user-friendly search function specifically searches ASA webinars by industry sector, job title, keyword, and more. (Go to [americanstaffing.net/webinars](http://americanstaffing.net/webinars).)

And if that weren’t enough, ASA-certified professionals who tune into the webinars earn continuing education credit—which means they have a robust, free source of the CE they need to maintain their credentials.

Among the most popular webinars the association produces is the quarterly ASA State of the Industry webinar, presented in partnership with Inavero. Introduced in 2014, this webinar series delivers the latest industry data and analysis, legislative updates from the ASA legal team, and business insights gleaned from live interviews with industry executives. To date, the ASA State of the Industry webinars have reached participant capacity every time they’ve been produced. (Member firms that miss the live webinar can view the online recording later.)

**Another recent ASA rollout this year—a free app that allows participants to view webinars on their mobile devices.** During select ASA webinars, participant can also follow a live discussion on that webinar topic by following the association on Twitter. Participants who follow @StaffingTweets and tap into the hashtag #ASAWebLive can offer their thoughts and perspectives on the webinar’s content in real time.

“The education universe continues to expand and adapt to the needs of the industry,” says Tracy Rettie, CAE, vice president of education and chapter relations at ASA. “We know that staffing and recruiting professionals work in fast-pace environments, and we have to make it easy and convenient for them to maintain that competitive edge.”

in their work. These are the employees who are the most likely to stick with the company, be the biggest producers, and offer clients the highest level of service.

“Staffing companies are acutely aware of the fact that there are not enough existing staffing industry professionals to hire,” Mee says. “Everybody is looking to hire quality recruiters and sales people and branch managers. And there’s a finite number of those people.”

Mee, Blake, and other experienced industry professionals say there’s no better way to achieve a competitive advantage than by demonstrating

that your firm's employees have the best skills and knowledge in the industry. Plus, those working for your firm are more likely to stay and grow with the firm, while talented professionals considering their staffing career choices are more likely to be attracted to your team.

It's well-known that many of today's leaders in the staffing, recruiting, and workforce solutions industry didn't land successful careers and develop success-

ful businesses as part of a deliberate plan. Many in this generation of industry leaders found rewarding professions in staffing by circumstance, friendly introduction, or coincidence. Traditionally, staffing careers have not been part of the traditional college and university landscape. (See the sidebar "Staffing as a Career Initiative Takes Flight.") But given the pace at which the industry has grown and changed—and the current demand for talented staffing professionals—education and training has taken an even more important seat at the strategic table.

However, budgeting for even a relatively small investment in professional development and training can be a challenge for small to medium-sized organizations, says Rettie.

"When we speak to the owner or manager of a department, we ask, 'Have you thought about the courses and programs that would be of value to your team over the next 12 months?' Because there is so much out there, and the workplace is so competitive, that they really need to take advantage of it."

It seems the industry has reached a point on the trajectory of growth, where those companies that make professional development a priority will be best-equipped to continue on the growth path—and those that don't will begin to see their competitive advantage level off.

ASA member companies can participate in nearly 50 live ASA webinars throughout the year on a variety of industry topics—at no cost—as well as tap into hundreds of on-demand recorded webinars. Plus, participating in these webinars means ASA-certified professionals can earn CE hours toward maintaining their credentials—and again, at no cost.

"What makes them such a vast value is they are free and available at any time," explains Blake, who also serves as chair of the association's education committee. "The webinars are well-produced and focus on topics that are timely and of great importance to the industry."

The free webinars are an extremely valuable benefit of membership—but staffing and recruiting professionals are busy, Rettie notes, and those that make professional development a priority tend to be those who also work hard to make the time.

## Capitalizing on Staffing Smarts

It's the other kind of business intelligence that is reaping results day in and day out. Knowledgeable, invested, and highly productive and engaged indus-

## Industry-Best Certification Programs Roll Out Anew

New editions of *Employment Law for Staffing Professionals* and *Co-Employment: Employer Liability Issues in Third-Party Staffing Arrangements* will be available soon. The new books, last updated in 2011, support a comprehensive update of the association's most popular certification programs—the ASA Certified Staffing Professional and Technical Services Certified programs. (Individuals who earn the TSC credential also receive the CSP credential.) These updated certification packages, in addition to federal and state study workbooks and an online practice exam, also include newly produced video learning modules featuring ASA attorneys Stephen Dwyer and La Tanya James-Rouse.

It's no wonder ASA-certified professionals often comment on how valuable the certification package study materials are—and soon, they'll be remarking on the association's latest offering. **When the new editions of *Employment Law* and *Co-Employment* hit the shelves, ASA will also roll out ebook versions—available for Kindle and Nook as well as Apple and Android mobile devices.** Industry professionals who are studying the texts can use the ebooks to search and bookmark content.

In the first half of 2015, the association launched its new Certified Health Care Staffing Professional program (see the sidebar "New ASA Certification Program Targets the Health Care Sector" on page 18), which uses *Employment Law* and *Co-Employment* as its core reference textbooks. The CHP program also includes health care staffing-specific study materials.

The ASA Certified Search Consultant® program, designed especially for the direct hire space, continues to gain traction. Introduced by the association nearly two years ago, **the CSC® credential is quickly becoming a must-have as it becomes increasingly challenging for company executives to hire and retain experienced and effective recruiters.**

"Recruiters on the search side of the staffing business are exposed to so many potential legal landmines that can be avoided," says John Thomas, CSP, CSC, field consultant with Oklahoma City-based Express Employment Professionals. Thomas was the first to earn the CSC credential in 2013 and has since been an ardent advocate of its value to search professionals.



try professionals are winning business—and keeping business—for the nation’s most successful staffing, recruiting, and workforce solutions companies. And, unlike economic trends and related data, the kind of business intelligence rooted in education and professional development is a sure thing—an investment guaranteed to pay dividends.

Jim Clifton, chairman and chief executive officer of Gallup for the past 26 years, is the creator of the Gallup Path, a metric-based economic model that establishes the linkages among human nature in the workplace, customer engagement, and business outcomes. Clifton has made headlines—and not just in the business press—because his research has shown that merely having happy employees just doesn’t cut it when it comes to what’s best for companies.

In a recent interview with *Fast Company* magazine, Clifton called the idea of trying to make people happy at work through perks and prizes a “terrible” strategy.

“What companies will inevitably find is that the only way to make a person happy is to give them a job that matches well to their strengths, a boss who cares about their development, and a mission that gives them feelings of purpose.”

The staffing, recruiting, and workforce solutions business is rife with mission and purpose, says Campbell of Hire Dynamics. “I’m sure all of us who work in the staffing industry have had that energizing moment...when you experience that rewarding feeling that comes with helping someone find work. We are part of a great industry. We make a difference. What we do matters.”

Add high-caliber education to that mission and purpose and you get smart, engaged, high-performing employees who find great satisfaction in making significant contributions that drive a company’s innovation, productivity, and long-term success.

“Many companies, like Google, offer perks because they create conveniences for employees,” Clifton told *Fast Company*, “but there’s no cause and effect in terms of engagement and high performance. I think perks make a little bit of difference to people, but the benefit is granular compared to a focus on individual expansion.” (Clifton is bringing his expertise to Staffing World® in October; see a brief *Staffing Success* interview with him, starting on page 23).

Mee has eight internal employees working for her company—a small firm on the wide spectrum of

## Staffing as a Career Initiative Takes Flight

In his last *Staffing Success* column as ASA chairman, Dan Campbell, CSP, made strategic and heartfelt comments about the future of the staffing, recruiting, and workforce solutions industry.

“The future of our industry—and the future leaders who will lead it—is by far the nearest and dearest topic I’ll continue to address as a past ASA chairman and as a staffing professional who loves this business,” wrote Campbell, chief executive officer of Atlanta-based Hire Dynamics.

“On many occasions I have said: What we do matters. What we do makes a difference in people’s lives. **We also work in a \$130 billion business that has created more jobs than any other industry since the end of the recession.** So why do so few individuals graduate from college with their sights set on careers in the staffing industry?”



In that column late last year, Campbell introduced a taskforce aimed at promoting careers in the staffing industry. Since then, **ASA has launched the Staffing as a Career initiative aimed at providing college students information and resources related to careers in staffing.** The association is partnering with organizations like Jobs for America’s Graduates and the National Association of Colleges and Employers to help disseminate information and drive traffic to *staffingasacareer.net*, where ASA is helping to collect information useful to those interested in a staffing career.

If your staffing firm is interested in getting involved in the Staffing as a Career initiative, contact Tracy Rettie, CAE, vice president of education and chapter relations for ASA, at [trrettie@americanstaffing.net](mailto:trrettie@americanstaffing.net).

U.S. staffing and recruiting operations. But a focus on education and training helps level the playing field.

“Education and professional development keep us a step ahead of the competition—but more importantly, it keeps us abreast of what’s really happening in our industry,” Mee explains. “As a result, we are better at what we do. We are better in terms of the resources and the services we provide to our clients. We’re subject-matter experts in the staffing and recruiting industry.” ■

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