



## Hire Tough and Manage Easy

by John R. Hall

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*International Service Leadership (ISL) Members Learn About "A" Players*

NASHVILLE — Mel Kleiman, president of Humetrics, had some questions for International Service Leadership (ISL) members attending the association's most recent meeting at the Gaylord Opryland Hotel.

"How many of you set targets every day?" he asked. "How many of you raise the bar all of the time and raise the standard for what is acceptable?"

Kleiman, a motivational speaker and authority on employee hiring and retention, wanted to know if HVAC contractors take the time to know how to hire and retain the best employees available, not just ones who can, as he put it, "fog a mirror." He joked, "After all, you are not allowed to ask someone if they are living or dead before you hire them."

Kleiman compared hiring practices of some businesses to jigsaw puzzles. "What is the most important piece of the jigsaw puzzle?" he asked his audience, before supplying his answer: "The box. It shows what the puzzle looks like. We often hire for what a person looks like, who they are, rather than for what they know."

He noted that business owners often fall into the trap of hiring people who are good at interviewing. As he explained, they could be good at interviewing because they have had a lot of experience at it.

"A good person shows up for the interview and then the evil twin shows up for work," said Kleiman. "And the problem is that once the employee is hired, it may take a lot of time and money to 'show them the door.'"

"The biggest liability you have is the people you hire. They can come back and sue you."

So where do employers find just the right people to hire? In Kleiman's estimation, it often takes a little creative thinking. He related the story about an HVAC contractor who, during a heat wave in Houston when service techs were being overworked, put a billboard up next to a supply house with the message "40-hour work weeks." According to Kleiman, the owner had several good applicants from people who wanted to work under less-stressful conditions.

## **DO YOUR HOMEWORK**

Kleiman suggested that business owners make a “shopping list” to understand what they are really looking for in an employee. Employers may say they know what they are looking for but aren’t certain until they put those features in writing. These questions should be answered before the interviewing process, he stressed.

There should also be a list— created by the owner with help from the employees — of the top 10 reasons why a person would want to work in that business.

Once the interview process has started, Kleiman said it is important to find out what people don’t like to do and then “figure out how they can get it done.”

He added, “Some of the questions that business owners should be asking themselves are: Where do you find good employees? How do we ask better interview questions?”

Kleiman suggested that one place to find good employees may be right under the employer’s nose. “How many of you have a system in place for calling good employees who have left you?” he asked ISL members. “If you ask them to come back, the worst answer you can get is ‘no.’ So, why not ask?”

He suggested calling the employee a week after they started another job, during the “confused” stages of learning a new job.

He found that one good question to ask candidates is: “What was the last thing you learned?” He encouraged employers to also ask each candidate to explain his/her answer. Kleiman said learning about a person’s first job can reveal a lot about that person.

He said employers should ask interviewees to rank themselves on a scale of 1-10, and then ask what it would take to raise that number.

## **NOW YOU HAVE TO KEEP THEM**

Once an employee is hired, there is no guarantee that he or she will like the job or be able to blend in. Kleiman had some tips on easing a new employee into the work environment.

“Never start a person on a Monday,” he said. “Everything is too hectic on Monday and someone may not have the time to adequately orient a new person. Start them later in the week when things have calmed down.

“An employee’s manager must spend the first hour with him or her. And each new employee should be given a ‘buddy’ at the beginning. At the end of the first day, the employee’s manager should spend at least 15 minutes recapping the day. The manager should stay in touch all of the first week and the owner should get in touch after the first week.”

Kleiman thinks it is important to have a good retention program, and it begins with getting employees involved in the hiring process of other employees. He likes the idea of a referral program where employees are paid upfront when someone they referred to the company is hired.

He also believes that employees should be told why they could be fired, which takes the guesswork out of the firing, if it happens, and leads to better relations. "Make the employee fire themselves," he said.

*Visit [www.islinc.net](http://www.islinc.net) for more information on ISL and membership benefits. To learn more about Mel Kleiman and Humetrics, visit [www.melkleiman.com](http://www.melkleiman.com).*

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