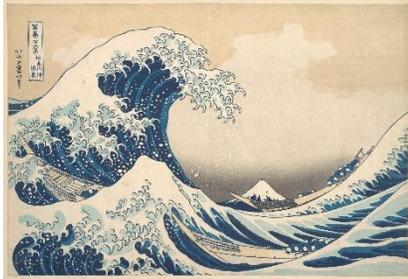


### Vermont public libraries & the “turnover tsunami”

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) has been tracking and reporting on the seismic shifts happening in the world of work through the pandemic. One item that has caught my attention this spring has been their reports of huge numbers of employees



quitting their jobs – what they call the “turnover tsunami.” VTLIB reports seeing an unusually high

turnover rate of employees in Vermont public libraries. It’s our own home-grown version of the tidal wave.

Roy Maurer, writing for SHRM<sup>1</sup> in mid-March, said that studies were showing that “as many as half of workers intend to look for a new job this year.”

The exodus has many reasons. Employees are reporting that they are working *more* hours than ever before. Poor organizational communication and support through the pandemic, and lack of follow-up on the part of organizations to employee feedback are also noted. The keen challenges of working at home with children and isolation, particularly for extroverts, add to the mix.

All this has led to burnout on a massive scale. Perhaps you may be able to relate. According to Maurer “...57 percent of U.S. employees say they are burnt out”, and this has added to pent up demand for change. The traditional reasons for quitting and moving on continue to be important drivers. They are pay, promotion, or a career pivot.

### What can you do to keep your best?

There aren’t any surprises in what you can do to keep the people you want from leaving. You’ve heard it before – the basics of people-management: clear communication, creating community and empathy are your strongest cards in engaging and retaining your employees and volunteers. Also...

- Keep top performers engaged – spend time with them. Nurture and challenge them.
- Recognize employees for their work as individuals and for their contributions to the team and library.
- Listen to employees. Respond to feedback.
- Invest in them through professional development. A little goes a long way.

### What can you do to hire the best?

You may very well be experiencing employee turnover in your library. The good news is that the “turnover tsunami” means that there are great people out there available for hire!

“How-to hire great employees” guides are plentiful on the internet. I’ve reviewed a number of them, including SHRM’s significant articles and hiring tools. I can also speak from experience. My number one recommendation is to use behavior-based interviewing techniques.



- **Behavior based** interviewing techniques ask specific questions that relate the job description to the candidate’s experiences. The candidate is asked about actual experiences, not theoretical questions.
- Here is a link<sup>2</sup> to a good article on behavior-based interviewing from the *interviewer’s* perspective, as well as one<sup>3</sup> from the *interviewee’s* perspective.

Below is a quick checklist of things to think about as you approach the hiring process. Getting your ducks in a row will help you hire well. I modified this list from guidance<sup>4</sup> from SHRM, taking into account the reality of citizen-trustees and small staffing requirements of most Vermont public libraries.

<sup>1</sup> [Turnover ‘Tsunami’ Expected Once Pandemic Ends \(shrm.org\)](https://www.shrm.org), by Roy Maurer, March 12, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> [How to Conduct a Behavioral Interview for a Job \(thebalancecareers.com\)](https://thebalancecareers.com). Accessed June 21, 2021.

<sup>3</sup> [How to Conduct a Behavioral Interview for a Job \(thebalancecareers.com\)](https://thebalancecareers.com). Accessed June 21, 2021.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/tools-and-samples/hr-forms/pages/hiringpracticeschecklist.aspx>. Accessed June 22, 2021.

**Sample Hiring Process Checklist**

- Library director and / or trustee chair works to confirm key items
  - a. Budget for vacant position. You have the money, right?
  - b. Discuss job description, needs of the library, preferred job skills, hours worked, benefits provided, etc. This is a really important step. You can't write a job posting – or hire the “right” person- if you have an out-of-date job description or the details are wrong. For instance, has the pandemic made to pivot to exciting new ways of doing things that you are continuing into the future?
  - c. Municipal libraries – work closely with town to ensure correct information!
- Search committee formed – it may be the director herself, or perhaps a sub-committee of the trustees. Without going over-board, several voices add to see different perspectives. Determine beforehand *who* gets to decide – director, chair, simple majority, or other?
- Create job posting. The job posting should quickly convey the essential elements of the job, the characteristics of an applicant, and a compelling few words on why your library is a great place to work.
  - a. Because pay and benefits are not significant drivers attracting library job applicants, focus on the wonderful aspects of your library and community.
  - b. Be realistic about job requirements. Are you really going to get a MLIS in that job at *that* pay rate with no benefits? Don't block fantastic candidates in your community from applying by shoveling on a lot of restrictive requirements in the job description and posting. Look for ways to attract good candidates from other sectors like education or the humanities, with transferable skills.
  - c. There are a lot of great examples of job postings on the VTLIB and VLA list serves. Tap your library colleagues for their “best thinking.” [VTLIB Niche Academy](#) offers general guidance around HR topics. And VTLIB consultants are extraordinarily helpful – tap their knowledge!
- Job is posted. Think about how and where this is done; keep in mind diversity goals – will this reach the candidates you want to reach? Be creative while also using the tried and true (VTLIB, VLA, and more). Remember to use reasonable and clear timelines to get the best pool you can.
- Review applications. Did you receive the documents you requested? How do they stack up against the job description? Who are the most compelling?
- Decide how you'd like to approach interviewing. Will top candidates be interviewed in person, or perhaps over video?
- After interviews, discuss and rank candidates.
- Top candidate's references checked. I always think that it is a good idea to check your “second place” candidate's references too – if you delay, they will know automatically that they may have not placed first.
- Discuss and agree on job offer specifics for the candidate.
- Candidate is *verbally* offered and accepts the job.
- Candidate is *formally* offered and accepts the job in *writing*.
- Send communication to other candidates notifying them that the position has been filled.
- Onboarding schedule set up for new hire.
- Ensure hiring paperwork is completed including I-9, benefits enrollment, federal and state tax forms, etc., and new employee file is created.
- Remember to collect all paperwork related to the interview process (applications, interview notes, etc.) for recordkeeping purposes. Store in secure place!

**Make the onboarding experience great.** A great hire will likely under-perform and be less engaged if you don't spend time training, welcoming them into your library's culture, and setting clear expectations. Create an onboarding schedule to keep things on track. Do your best. The time it takes to train another employee while you struggle to do your own work can be daunting, but your investment will return big dividends over time.

**How to attract good people to library wages?**

You don't get rich working at a library. This is not an industry secret. In fact, municipal and non-profit jobs are generally in the "you have to love what you're doing" category. And therein lies the key – you have to sell the job for other things in addition to putting bread on the table. Here are some thoughts.

- **The big one – purpose and contribution.** In a socialtalent.com article<sup>5</sup> on recruiting at low salary, the author writes a clear mission and understanding of their "critically important



role" is huge. It boils down to purpose and passion. We want to contribute. We want to see our children blossom, our communities thrive. Compared

to so many jobs, library positions have deep purpose and give big intrinsic rewards. A lot of people get *rich* working at a library. Focus on this. My library director positively lights up when talking about the patrons' experiences and interactions. She loves what she does, and it shows. This kind of feeling, these kinds of uncountable rewards are something you need to stress. It is *fun* working at the library. You can't buy love.

- **Reliable schedule.** This is an important selling point if only part-time. You know Vermont – a lot of people have more than one job. Having a reliable schedule helps employees manage the other parts of their lives more easily.
- **On the other hand, flexibility.** Allowing some flexibility in the job is also a benefit. Flexibility may be about times to work, or options for remote work if appropriate.
- **Perks?** Work-from home, flexible scheduling, access to professional development are all things that can ease the pain of a lower pay check.
- **Advancement?** Is there any chance for advancement within the library?

- **Benefits.** Although regrettably not universal by any stretch in Vermont public libraries, offering benefits attracts people who couldn't otherwise consider applying. Health insurance, health savings accounts, and retirement are valuable. If the position offers benefits, trumpet them. Also, remember that any employee age 18 or over, averaging 18 or more hours per week, and is expected to work more than 20 weeks per year is eligible for sick leave under [Vermont's Paid Sick Leave Law](#).

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*UVM Extension helps individuals and communities put research-based knowledge to work.*

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<sup>5</sup> [3 Sure-Fire Ways to Recruit Top Talent on a Low Salary \(socialtalent.com\)](#). Accessed June 22, 2021.