

HR NEWS

IPMA-HR

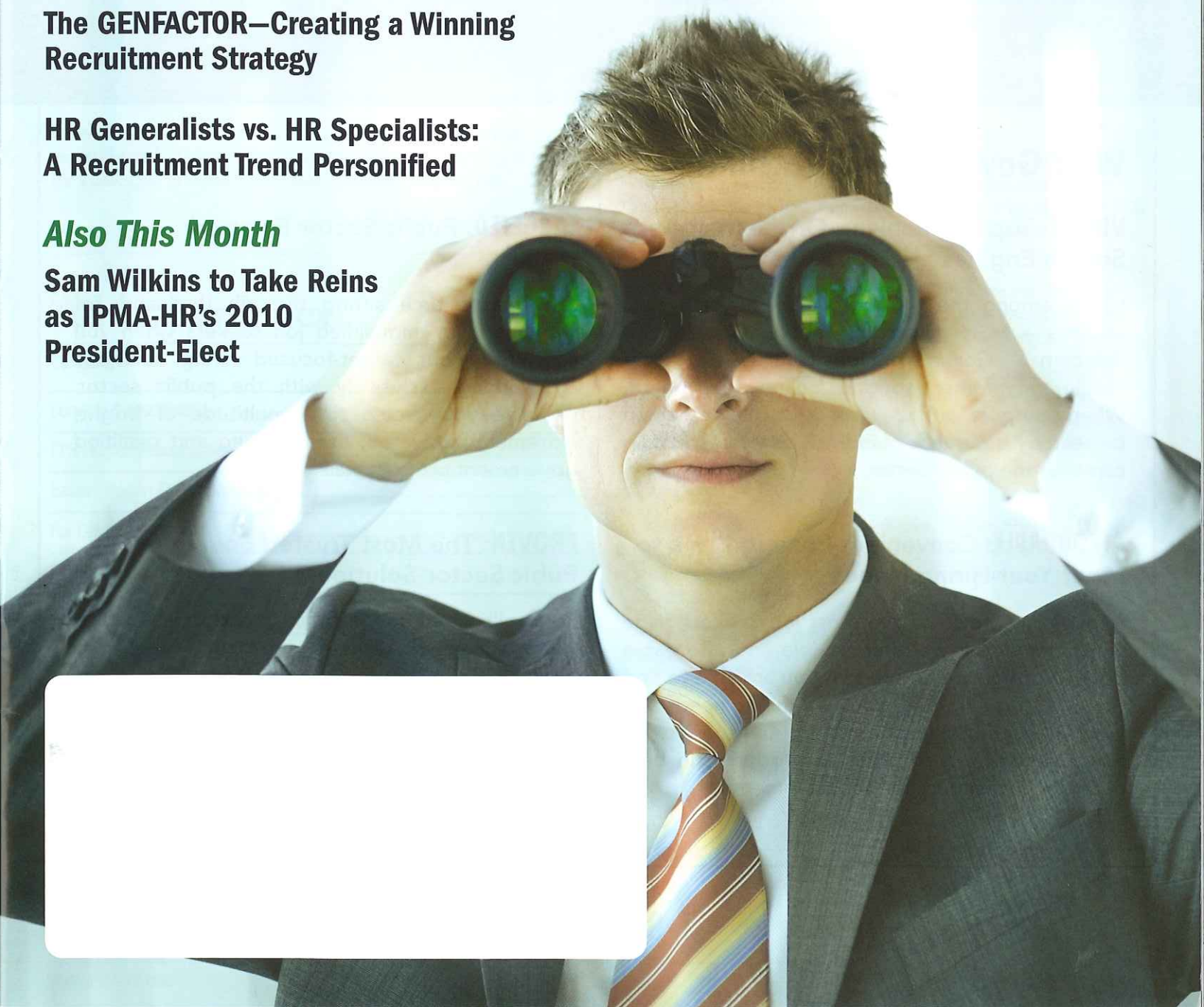
Recruitment

The GENFACTOR—Creating a Winning Recruitment Strategy

**HR Generalists vs. HR Specialists:
A Recruitment Trend Personified**

Also This Month

**Sam Wilkins to Take Reins
as IPMA-HR's 2010
President-Elect**



Strategic Transformation: The Rebirth of Kentucky's Personnel Cabinet-Modernizing Government through HR

By Nikki R. Jackson

In his inaugural speech on December 11, 2007, Kentucky's 61st governor, Steven L. Beshear, challenged all Kentuckians to "...choose the path of progress. This path will involve new thinking and new ideas. It will require cooperation and patience...and it will demand courage." As an observer that day, those words rang clear to me. Now is the time to begin transforming the practice of human resources for the commonwealth's 33,000 employees.



Nikki R. Jackson

Early in my career, I worked as a manager of human resource policy and compliance programs. Daily I investigated various employees' claims of harassment and discrimination. I noticed many of the claims did not surface out of a true compliance issue, but rather because of a lack of commitment from management. Employees are looking for more. They expect commitment that is meaningful to them. Upon understanding this dynamic, I immediately busied myself in exploring human resource work that focused less on compliance and more on commitment to culture, organizational dynamics and leadership discipline.

When I began the important work of public service, I thought about the words of Gov. Beshear and reflected on my past experiences. I had to start this job with boundless courage, an unrelenting focus on the *human* in human resources and develop a plan to achieve four specific goals.

The first of our four goals became to create a shared sense of purpose. That goal was accomplished with the establishment of our cabinet's mission, vision and values. Developed by our employees, we live and work from these doctrines every day by providing leadership and guidance to attract, develop, motivate and retain a talented, diverse workforce. We also foster an understanding of and adherence

to regulatory requirements, and create a positive, supportive work environment that values all employees.

Second, we set out to foster an environment of trust by building relationships based on mutual interest and respect. Internally, our Center for Strategic Innovation serves as a generator and conduit for ideas and suggestions that may benefit the entire cabinet. They assure that our products, services and offerings align to our vision and our strategic goals. They own our brand identity and serve as the creative engine behind our accelerated success. They also serve as internal consultants within the cabinet in the areas of communications and work life effectiveness, organizational effectiveness and strategic planning, customer service excellence, research and best practices, Web development and media solutions, and graphics and creative concept design.

We are building trust externally through partnerships with our stakeholders, other cabinet secretaries, other HR leaders and all of our external partners, namely the Society of Human Resources Management (SHRM), as well as the University of Kentucky's Institute for Workplace Innovation. Our cabinet recognizes that successful realization of our mission and vision is inextricably linked to our ability to work with and secure the support of our HR peers and leaders across state government. Out of this rationale, our Kentucky State Government HR Leadership Consortium was born. Here we explore opportunities to collapse HR practices and programs, leverage talent, and behave more like one employer.

Third, we developed four strategic questions that guide our work and help assure that our vision statement comes to fruition. We call them our "big questions":

■ **How can we make Kentucky state government an employer of choice?**

As the labor market tightens, competition among employers for the "best and brightest" will become more intense. For us to fulfill our mission to "attract, develop, motivate and retain a talented, diverse

workforce,” we need to implement strategies that position Kentucky state government as an employer of choice for current and potential employees.

■ How can we foster a learning and development culture?

One of the key elements for creating employee engagement and retention is a focus on personal and professional growth. We must create opportunities for sharing knowledge across the enterprise and enable employees to fully develop their talents and skills for the benefit of the commonwealth and themselves.

■ How can we create a “one employer” mindset across Kentucky state government?

In the past, the various cabinets have tended to operate as autonomous organizations rather than as parts of a larger enterprise, sometimes leading to duplication and inefficiencies. We seek to find ways to allow agencies the necessary independence to meet their unique needs while encouraging the sharing of services across the enterprise to ensure consistency and efficient use of resources.

■ How do we enhance customer value?

Now you know as well as I do that HR tends to create processes that only make sense to HR. That is especially true for some public sector employers who are incredibly reliant on rules, mandates, policy, regulation, etc. However, the reality is that even in the face of rigid statutory and legal frameworks, everything HR does can and should be focused on the customer and outcomes that help to further their needs. As we endeavor to transform human resource services in the public sector, we need to move beyond providing excellent customer service to ensuring customer value. Our programs and services need to be measured according to the value they add to our customers.

In response to each of these “big questions,” each department within the cabinet is charged with responding in kind with “we will” statements which represent their commitments against each strategic goal. It is a two-year plan and represents our formula for strategic discipline. Our hope is that this formula for transformation can result in a more engaged workforce. Nevertheless, while engagement is important, it does not happen by chance. It can happen only when both leadership and employees are committed to a shared vision, when leaders are committed to employee engagement, and when they are as sensitive to employee perceptions as they are to employee performance.

Last, we started our pursuit towards levity by injecting fun opportunities at work. Levity is an important component to creativity. It helps to assure the psyche is relaxed and free to innovate. It releases that precious discretionary effort I long to see in our employees. We’ve created a cabinet mascot; a caterpillar named Marti, who, through his metamorphous into a butterfly, has helped us implement change management.

We have sought to create a culture of gratitude, thanking our employees for their contributions through reward and recognition programs. We encourage peer to peer and manager to employee feedback in very public but fun ways. We are holding lunch book

club meetings, giving employees flexible work options, and establishing a Journey to Wellness program.

Kentucky’s Personnel Cabinet aspires to serve in an incredibly inspiring way. Through the process of strategic transformation, we are poised to excel in our efforts. Fortunately, we have a governor who understands, encourages and values strategic human resources. Our focus now is less on what we have been and more on what we can be. Through greater focus on our programs, our behaviors, our infrastructure and our outcomes, we are helping lead Kentucky forward. Our employees deserve a work environment that is saturated with meaning, opportunity, support and fun. In exchange, we see production and innovation from our employees like never before.

In short, Kentucky’s Personnel Cabinet is looking to challenge our state’s employment culture. Ultimately, an organization and its employees must be able to answer with emphatic and unapologetic conviction the essential question: What do we stand for? Consistent with the style and expectations of our governor, Kentucky’s Personnel Cabinet perceives itself as servants, first, last, and always. Indeed, we are living our motto “We serve the people who serve the people.”

Nikki Jackson was appointed by Gov. Steve Beshear to serve as Kentucky’s Personnel Cabinet secretary on December 12th, 2007. She has 14 years of experience in human resources and has worked for several organizations in leadership roles. She is a member of the Society of Human Resource Management where she serves on the State Council, the Florida Bar-Labor and Employment Law Section, and the National Employment Law Council. Jackson earned a juris doctorate degree from the University of Miami, School of Law, and a bachelors of arts degree from Hampton University. She has been recognized as one of the 10 Most Inspirational Women in Louisville by artist Pat Gallagher. Her portrait, “The Matador,” was unveiled at the Muhammad Ali Center’s Celebrating the Power of Women event in April of 2009. She was also recently selected one of Business First’s Forty Under 40 winners for 2009. —N