

## ***Southwest Airlines Employee Development and Retention***

The success of Southwest Airlines Co. in becoming a respected leader and high performer in the airline industry can be traced to the company's innovative work and human resource strategies. Southwest deemphasizes the creation of a formal organizational structure. Instead, the company has a rather informal work structure that encourages employee participation. This strategy has provided Southwest with a dedicated workforce committed to quality and customer service. One other component of the airline's success is management emphasis on human resource development. Management makes sure that employees are properly trained in every major work area. In addition, employees receive special courses on employee relations, stress management, decision-making, safety and career development.

Through its University for People, Southwest Airlines provides professional and personal development for its entire workforce. But the University for People is the umbrella department of a highly decentralized training structure—there are eight other training departments within Southwest, according to Fritz Petree, senior manager, Career Development Services and Virtual University at Southwest Airlines' University for People. Steve Thomas, president and CEO of Pathlore Software Corp states that the strategy translates into Southwest's success as a business. "They haven't had any layoffs. They have high employee retention rates," "They've got a very happy employee staff, and there's a great ability to move around and grow within the company, and they do this deliberately. ...They're still profitable, and a lot of it has to do with their culture, and a lot of their culture is driven not only by making sure that the employees are happy, but by making sure that they have the skills to do their jobs the best they can."

Companies can learn from best practices followed at Southwest Airlines to provide assessment and coaching to enhance employees' personal and professional growth. An online component to help assign and align people's personal development needs as well as enhancing their strengths in order for them to grow more effectively and a skills assessment and skills management system to help judge each employee's degree of fit with a particular job role and the company.

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