

Water Environment  
Association of Texas

# Filling the Workforce Pipeline:

WEAT Operator Apprenticeship Program

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Leslie Cloer | Trinity River Authority

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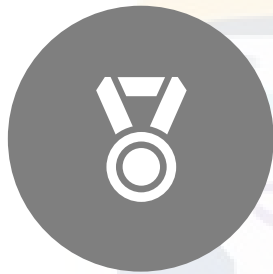
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# So, what's the problem?

*Attracting, training, and retaining a skilled workforce is one of the most pressing issues facing the sector today.*



Silver Tsunami



Positions Require Operator Licenses

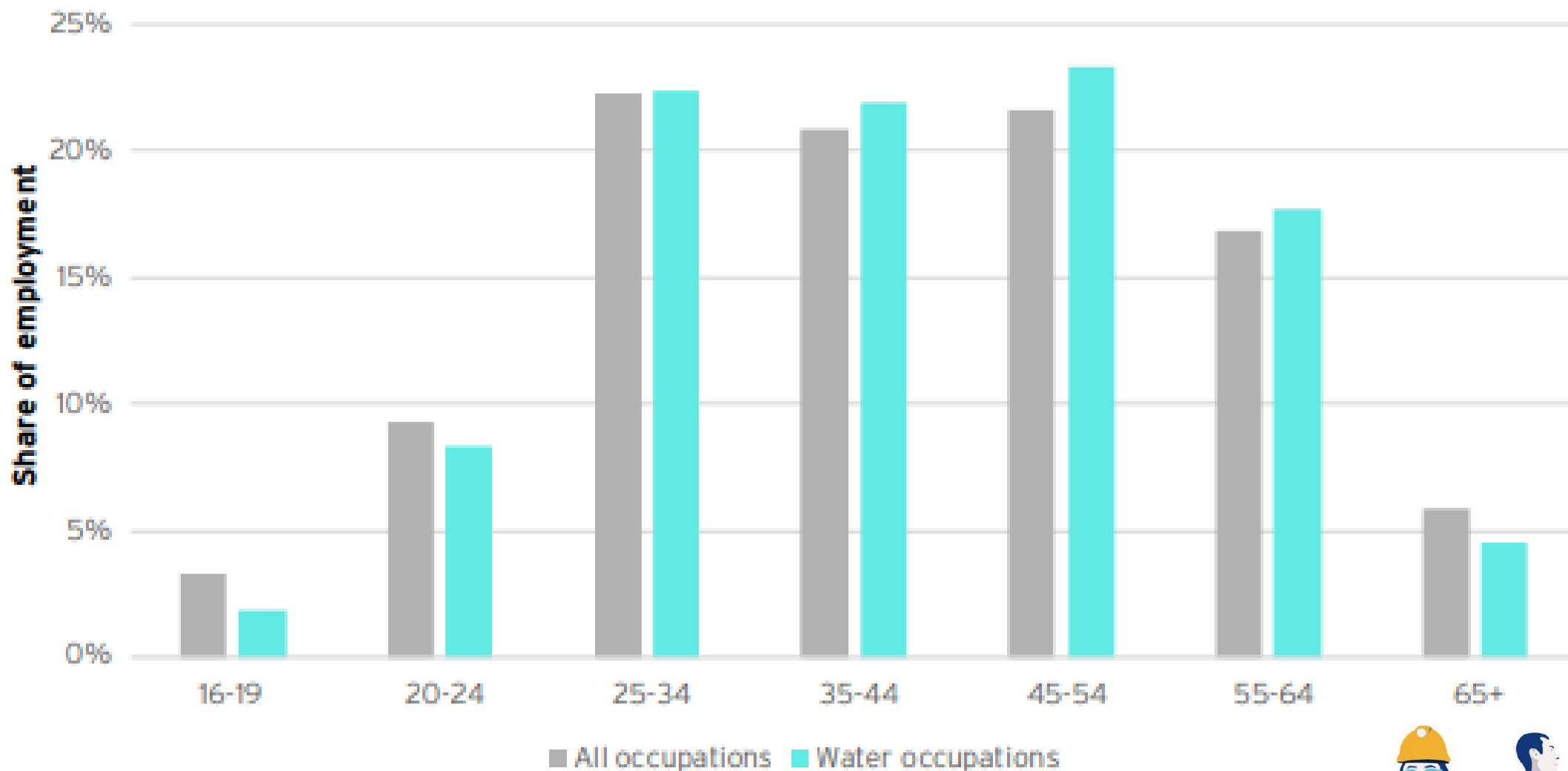


Supply and Demand Gaps



Difficulty in Attracting New and Diverse Talent Pools

## Age range of workers in water occupations vs. all occupations



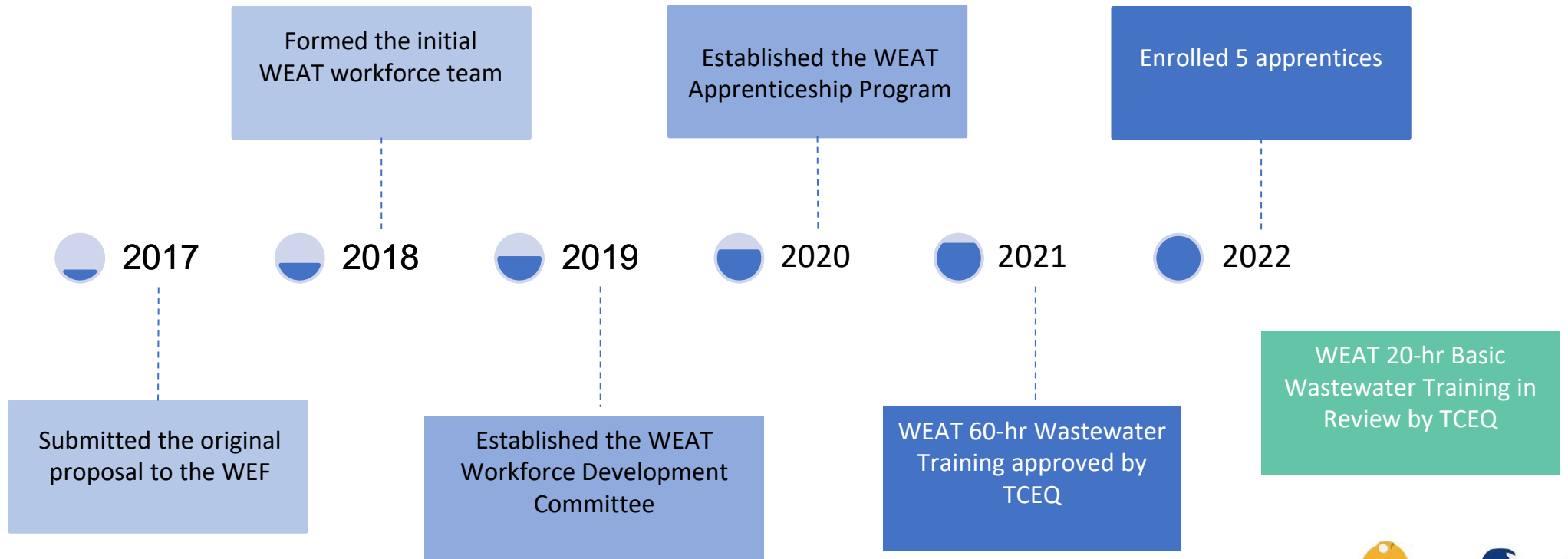
Source: Brookings analysis of BLS Occupational Employment Statistics and CPS data





# The Journey

Water Environment Association of Texas





# The Apprenticeship



Water



1. Water Operator
2. Wastewater Operator
3. Electronic Technician
4. Mechanic *Coming Soon!*

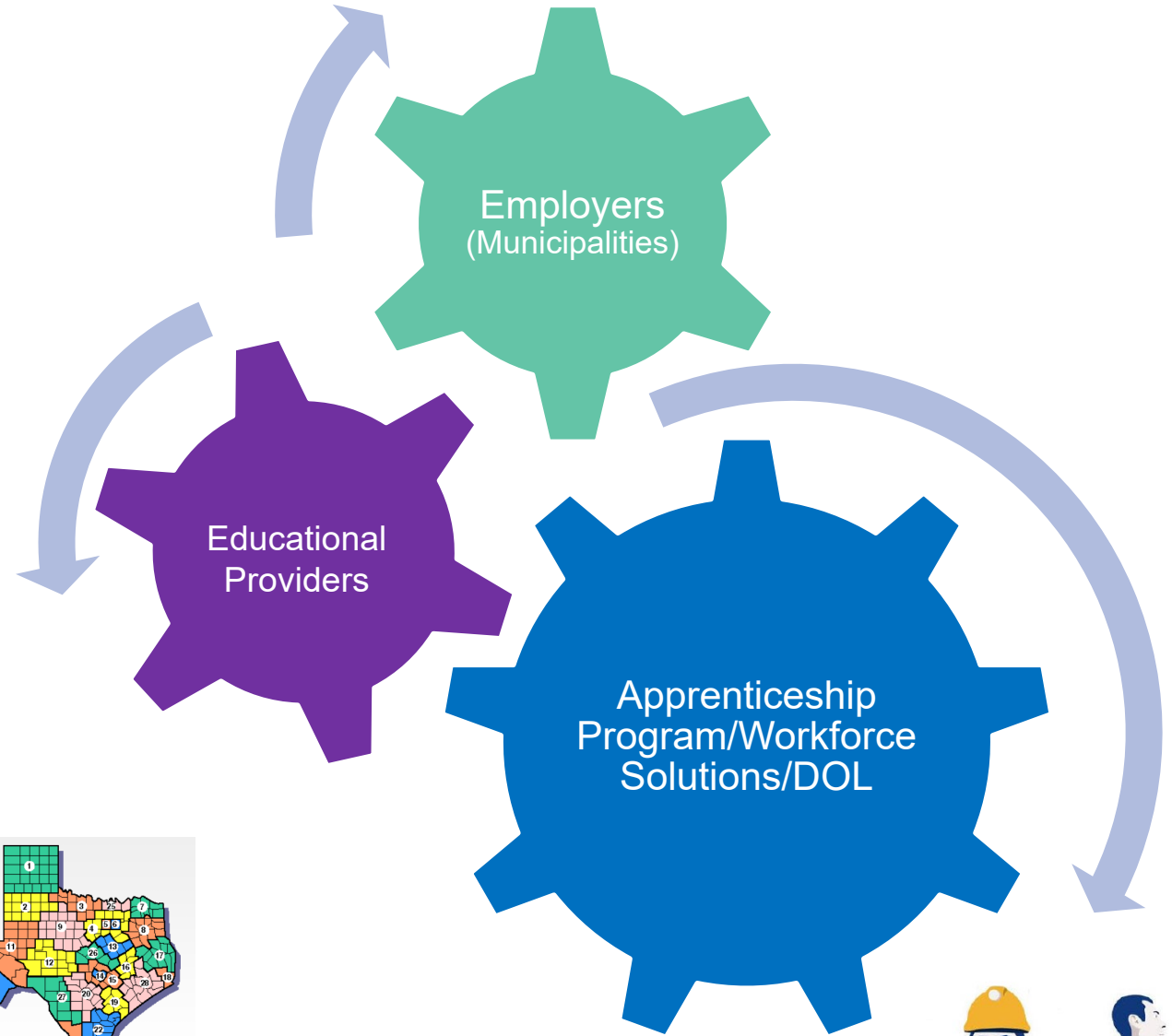
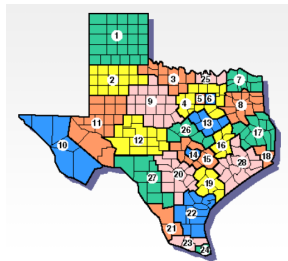




# Partnerships



SAWS, Fort Worth Water, Liberty Utilities, UTRWD, Dallas Water, Houston Water, SJRA...







# Apprenticeship Program Structure

## WEAT Responsibilities

- Clearinghouse for Apprenticeship Documentation
- Maintain Department of Labor RAPIDS Apprenticeship Database
- Communication as needed with Workforce Boards and Department of Labor



## Employer Partners

- “Business as Usual”
- OJT
- TCEQ Certified Classroom Training
- Wage Scale
- Performance Reviews



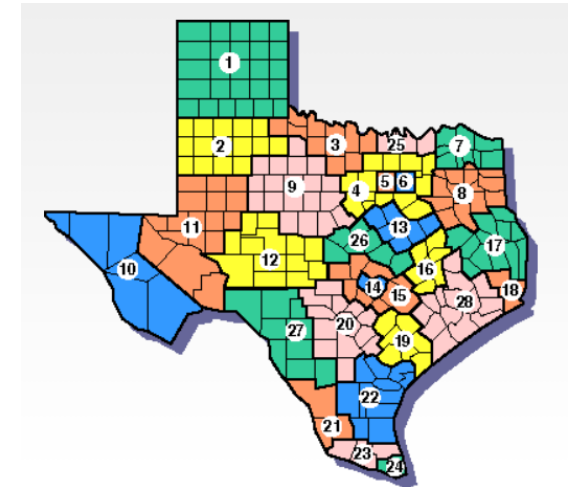


# Federal Funds for Texas Needs

United States  
Department of  
Labor

Texas Workforce  
Commission

Regional Workforce  
Solutions Boards







# Benefits... Or What's in it for Me?

## Employer Partner

- Funding assistance to offset the cost of employment
- Candidate Referrals from Workforce Board
- Leverage established educator partnerships

## Apprentice

- Support in finding a Career not just a Job
- Other funding potential based on qualifications and background





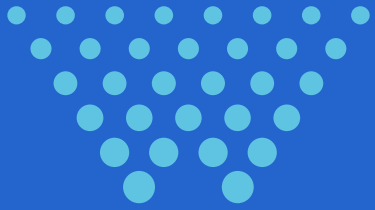
# Next Steps...

- **EMPLOYERS:** Send an Email and we'll set up a call!
- **INDIVIDUALS:** Pathway to Involvement? WEAT needs YOU!

## How to join:

- Join the WEAT Workforce Development Committee (join through WEAT's Website)
- Volunteer at Texas Water 2023 Exhibit Hall Tour
- Submit a Workforce Abstract to Texas Water 2023
- Send email to [admin@weat.org](mailto:admin@weat.org) requesting more info!





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# Public Works Workforce Challenges

- Jim Proce, ICMA-CM
- City Manager
- City of Anna
- <https://www.linkedin.com/in/jimproce/>

# Introduction – Jim Proce, ICMA-CM

- City Manager
  - Assistant City Manager
  - Public Works Director
  - Transportation Manager
  - Water Control District VP
  - Instructor (TSU; FT)
  - APWA Officer (Branch, Chapter, National)
  - UCF (MBA)
  - Rollins College (BS)
  - Harvard
- City of Anna Texas
  - High growth in all development sectors
  - Population growing exponentially (3X's in 5yrs)
  - Staff growing 75FTEs → 175FTEs → ?

# Unprecedented Challenges (Too Many)

- Operational departments like public works, police, fire overlooked during Covid (**can't work from home**)
- Recruitment shortfalls for entry levels in all areas; **competing with other professions** besides cities: retail, gas stations, fast food, remote employment options and more...
- **Retirements** of skilled and experienced workers leaving profession
- **Retention** of entry level and mid-level positions are being recruited by higher paying organizations
- Staff (managers) not focused on the big picture, like **succession planning**
- The millennial generation has **different work motivations and expectations** for greater work/life balance
- Expectations are increasing for customized benefits, mobility of benefits, and **flexible work options**
- **Quiet quitting**... I am just doing what my job description says (who is the problem here?)
- I am sure there are more...
- And all of these challenges are hitting us simultaneously
- **GOOD NEWS: Innovation is borne from crisis and unmet needs**





# Response to Challenges

- Talent Mindset – Culture
- Employer Value Proposition
- Recruitment
- Growing Talent - Training & Development
- Compensation Philosophy
- Financial Management
- Data Management
- And more...



# Talent Mindset

- Getting right people in the seats “on the bus”
- Everyone is responsible for attracting, developing and retaining staff
- Everyone is accountable for the team they build
- We need everyone to be good at what they do
- We win together and we lose together



# Employer Value Proposition

- Employer of choice!
- We talk about our values – Anna Cares
- ANNA CARES: Creative; Action, Responsibility, Excellence, Serve
- We drive “purpose” as a motivating factor in our collective success as we are “building community”
- We refer to everyone as “Neighbors” to include all those who live, work, play or just passing through
- We instill “family first” as our part of our culture
- We share these values with applicants, council, staff, and anyone that we make contact with, and it permeates throughout our organization



# Recruitment

- Where can we find good help?
  - Schools/Colleges – job fairs, city events, career days, internships, volunteers, summer programs, conferences
  - Headhunters & Networking
  - Social media: Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter
  - Professional Associations
  - Promotional Vacancies
  - Build your own
  - Think like a salesperson 24/7

# Growing Talent

- Building your own is required
- Professional development plans for all
- Training – internal and external sources
- Promotional vacancy preference – internals first
- Succession Planning – gap identification

# Compensation Philosophy



Establish the  
market



Be relevant and  
competitive in the  
market



Maintain a merit-  
based system



Maintain a  
retention system



Maintain  
promotional  
vacancy practice



Disclaimer: subject  
to annual funding



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# Financial & Data Management

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- Can I afford what I am doing? – 5-year forecasting modeling
- Know turnover rates on high turnover positions
- Over-Hire Program
- Vacancy savings management
- Comparative analysis – what is your competition doing?
- Transparency
- Talk about it constantly

# Time Management

- Schedule modifications
  - 14 hour – 3 days
  - 12 hour – 3-4 days
  - 10 hour – 4 days
  - 9 hour options – 4-5 days
- Flexible schedules
  - Variable/staggered start times
  - More coverage
  - Less overtime
- Staff autonomy





Questions?

<https://www.linkedin.com/in/jimproce/>

# 4 Elements of Talent Formula

Four Elements of a Talent Formula		
Elements	The Old Way	The Modern Way
<b>Talent Mindset</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having good people is one of many important performance levers.</li> <li>• Human resource management is responsible for people management including recruitment, compensation, performance reviews, and succession planning.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having the “right” talent throughout the organization is a critical source of our success.</li> <li>• Every manager is responsible for attracting, developing, and retaining talented people.</li> <li>• Every manager is explicitly accountable for the strength of the talent pool they build.</li> </ul>
<b>Employer Value Proposition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We expect people to pay their dues and work their way up before they get top jobs and higher salaries.</li> <li>• We have a strong value proposition that attracts potential employees.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We think of our people as partners and volunteers and realize we have to deliver on their dreams if we are to keep them.</li> <li>• We have a distinctive employee value proposition that attracts and retains talented people.</li> <li>• Our people feel good about their work experience.</li> </ul>
<b>Recruiting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recruitment is like purchasing; it is about picking the best from a long line of candidates.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Think like a “marketer.”</li> <li>• Recruitment is a key responsibility of all managers.</li> </ul>
<b>Growing Talent</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development is training around technical skills.</li> <li>• Development happens when you are fortunate enough to have a good manager.</li> <li>• Succession planning is about pre-selection, and we can’t do that.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development happens through a series of job experiences, as well as helpful coaching and mentoring.</li> <li>• Development is essential to performance and retention.</li> <li>• Training—I mean, learning—is targeted to strengthen the internal bench of potential successors and to equip our workforce with tomorrow’s skills today.</li> <li>• Succession planning is a risk management strategy for continuity of operations and is about providing opportunities to learn and grow to employees who exercise initiative.</li> </ul>