Thank you for listening to this edition of Career Cast. My name is Renee Clay, my pod casting partner this afternoon is Marla Scales. Marla is the Manager of Human Resources for ABF Freight System Incorporated. This is part of our series where we highlight recruiting employers. Folks who are here on campus, they’re looking for you and we want you to know as much about some of these companies as you possibly can.

Renee: So, Marla, can you tell us a little bit about your company, where you are, what you do.

Marla: ABF is a nationwide company. We are based in Fort Smith Arkansas, which appeals to a lot of people, just because they like a company that is based in Arkansas and the type of company that we are. However, that being sad, we also have facilities in all 50 states, we have even a facility in Hawaii, and also sales office outside the United States in both Mexico and Canada.

As far as what we do. We are a less than truck load carrier, meaning that we transport freight for our customers. Customers vary greatly, everyone from the government to a mom and pop shop that’s selling antiques. So the freight and the things that we move vary greatly. A lot of people have the conception when they think of freight as being a truckload carrier only, someone that each truck is filled with one particular customer’s freight. We are what is called less than truck load, meaning that our trailers may have freight from a number of different customers on that one particular trailer. I often compare it to the airline industry. If you are going to fly out of Fort Smith, you may get on an airplane and fly to Dallas. And then everyone is re-boarded onto different airplanes and flies from Dallas to their next destination. The less than truckload industry is a lot like that in that the freight is originally loaded in and shipped out to the next facility where it may very well be reworked and sent out to the next destination from that point.

Renee: Excellent. Marla, I want you tell our listeners a little bit about some of the opportunities for employment with ABF. You might want to address internships. I know you have a very structured management training program as a full time opportunity. Address some of the opportunities that students might have with your company.

Marla: First, the management training program is a great opportunity that we have. The training program, what we do is we hire students and they come to work for ABF. Their first five months of their employment they are a management trainee, meaning during that five months their primary focus is on learning. So they spend those five months working at one of our facilities, and working with everyone at that facility learning how each person fits into the puzzle, how their job relates to the big picture of ABF. You work with everyone from the payroll clerk, the cashier, the branch manager, to the operational side on the freight dock and then also on the sale side. So the type of work that you do varies greatly from day to day. Your main focus though is in the operations and in the sales. The reason being at the end of those five months we then see where we have an opening, whether that be as either an operation supervisor on the freight dock or as a sales representative. So therefore we focus during the training program on those two areas because that’s most likely where the trainee will be placed when they finish the training program.

Another big focus for someone interested in the training program is to make sure that they are truly willing to relocate. Because we are a nationwide company when you begin the training program, you will not be training in all likelihood in Fayetteville or in Fort Smith. Usually we train, the closest facility being North Little Rock where we have a large distribution center.
When you finish the training program however your first assignment, you won’t know until the end of those five months, at which time we’ll tell you where your first assignment will be and what that assignment will be. So you must go into it knowing that you are truly willing to relocate. And by that I don’t mean just outside of northwest Arkansas. Possibly even out of the state, very likely. And then also you must be willing to go into whether it is a sales rep position or an operations supervisor position, go into either one not just specifically be targeting toward one or the other.

Renee: One of the things that might be useful for students to hear is hear about the management training program from the perspective of someone who was formally in that program. We also have pod casting with us Gabe McBride. Gabe is a Branch Manager with ABF and was part of that management training program. And Gabe if you could maybe tell us what the strengths of that program were.

Gabe: I went through the management training program back in 2000 when I graduated from the University of Arkansas here in Fayetteville. And one thing that always was nerve racking to me, before I started, was you know, everyone said you’re going to be in the real world now. I kept hearing all this talk about the real world; you know it’s the unknown. What the management training program does is it really gives you a good base and it eases the transition into your first full time job. It really does give you a good base of knowledge and it does fit all the pieces of the puzzle together, so when you are given your first permanent assignment its not a shocking experience. You kind of have an idea of how this is all going to work and what the company is like. And it makes it a much more comfortable transition.

Renee: Marla you are here today interviewing. We appreciate you taking time out of that day to pod cast with us. Tell us what kind of candidate you are looking for, maybe some of the characteristics of a successful candidate.

Marla: One important focus when you’re looking for a management training candidate is someone that has leadership skills, the ability to motivate others. The focus on that being because when we hire a management trainee we aren’t looking for someone who is going to be a sales rep, we are not looking for someone who is going to be a operations supervisor. We are looking for the people that are going to be the next distribution center managers, the next branch managers, the next vice presidents, regional vice presidents. And so with that goal in mind it needs to be someone, not only with the ability to do the job of a sales rep, but someone that is more than that, wants to continue moving up from that, is motivated to do so, and has the skills and leadership skills to be able to do so. The ability to motivate others, like I said the focus on leadership, also of course, like I also said, the willingness to relocate, which is often necessary when you’re trying to move up in the company, someone that is goal setting and looks on down the road. Obviously with the management training program if your goal is to be a vice president in two years, that doesn’t happen with ABF. And therefore you have to be someone that’s willing to say: ok I’m willing to spend my first two years of employment as an operations supervisor, working on an off shift. But I’m ok with that because I know where I’m going to be ten years down the road. So someone that is able to focus on down the road, and willing to roll up their sleeves and work hard to get there is someone that we would focus on.

Renee: Do you guys have a preference as to academic major in a candidate? I mean do you care what their major has been.
Marla: I would definitely say that we very much appreciate the supply chain logistics majors from the University of Arkansas. So I can not answer that with out saying that is one of the greatest sources of management trainees that we have available to us. That being said however, we also have a lot of management trainees that come from a variety of backgrounds. We have regional vice presidents and actually I was discussing this in an interview because someone had a major that they were questioning. Would you be interested in me, you know my major is this. Is that ok, I’m not a supply chain major. And I explained to them that we have a regional vice president that has a major in the theater field, and very much unrelated to the industry. However, the main thing is that they have that degree, and that they are interested in working in transportation.

Renee: You recruit all over the place. How many resumes do you see in a maybe a calendar year?

Marla: I couldn’t begin to guess.

Renee: Thousands would you say?

Marla: I truly can not imagine. When you consider we recruit on campus at over 120 universities a semester each spring. And that doesn’t include the resumes I receive online every single day. So the numbers are amazing.

Renee: When you have a resume in front of you, as far as the information that is on that resume, I want the students to hear your perspective on what information on that resume do you find most of value?

Marla: One thing I encourage students to do on a resume, that they often do not do and that is list a variety of employment. Sometimes they think the only job that is relevant is if they’ve worked in our industry, or if they’ve done an internship in our industry. And they must realize from an employer’s perspective if you’ve worked in any job and worked there for an extensive period of time that’s very impressive to us. In that it shows you’ve got work ethics, it shows that you’re dedicated to the job. Someone who has been on the job for an extended period of time as obviously shown up on time, done a good job, especially if they’ve moved up and been promoted in that position. So no matter what that job experience is, I would encourage them to try to incorporate that into their resume. The other focus point I would bring up on your resume is your objective. And that is if you put an objective, and your objective is to work in the financial industry don’t use that resume to submit it to me to apply for the management trainee position. Either change the objective, or don’t include an objective, or use a more generic one. But I often get resumes where their goal is to be a financial analyst and their applying for a management trainee position, which the first thing that jumps up on the page, since its at the top, tells me are they really interested in this position, it makes me question that.

Renee: How many people do you think you interview in a year?

Marla: I personally interview or ABF as a whole?
I personally…wow, again I don’t know if I want to stop and realize how many I interview. I might get worried if I realize how many.

Renee: Do you have a favorite interview question? Do you have a question you ask every time? And when you ask that question what’s the objective? Why do you ask that particular question?
Marla: Of course the negative side of this is that my interview question is going to lose effectiveness now because everyone is going to know that I am going to ask this question and is going to be prepared for it. One thing I like to ask is if they have had an impact on someone, because I ask that to see if they are an influential person. If they have inspired a younger brother to finish their education, if they have been involved in extracurricular activities where they have worked with students and been a big brother to someone and the impact that that has that obviously is to me someone that it’s important to them and they are motivated by helping other people and have the ability to motivate other people.

Renee: Excellent. Marla, when you interview somebody, how important is it for them to know everything they can possibly know about your company before they come in there?

Marla: It’s important for them to know about the company when you consider the time we have for the interview is obviously limited. I’m trying during that time to ask them questions, learn about the interviewee, and they’re trying to sell themselves to me. If I have to also take the time to sell ABF to them that’s going to take up so much of our interview time we’re going to be very limited. To me if they are truly interested in that job, they are going to have done their homework, they’re going to know what ABF is about and what we do, and know the details of the management trainee program so that we don’t have to go over all those basics.

I want to thank Marla Scales. Again Marls is the manager of human resources. And Gabe McBride, Gabe is branch manager. They are both here representing ABF Freight System. They are here on campus recruiting today. This company is great friends with this Career Center. We appreciate them being here, and hiring you. I also want to thank you for listening to this, another in our recruiting employer series. Please continue to download and listen to Career Cast. My name is Renee Clay and we’re coming to you from the Career Center in the Sam M. Walton College of Business. Look for the next Career Cast very soon.