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Recruiting and retention - How do companies continue to attract and retain top performers?

November 19, 2007 - Spotlights

In the midst of advanced degrees, technical wittiness, and likeable personalities throughout the A/E/C and Environmental industries, lies the lack of recruitment and retention know-how. While some industry professionals responsible for these tasks do a good job, others just don't get it. What's the single most important piece of your firm's success? Your employees! That's why it's absolutely critical to retain the difference makers and recruit new professionals with similar capabilities. In no particular order, here are some tips and words of advice from one who hears about these topics daily.

Benefits, Benefits, and More Benefits. There is no question, job seekers are looking for more these days. Flexible work schedules, company vehicles, paid medical and dental benefits, more vacation time, and overtime pay or compensation time are among many of the benefits candidates seek. It's a financial burden as well as a logistical nightmare to offer all or even some of these. However, as these benefits become the norm, companies need to step up to stay competitive. Consider "paid-time-off" a combination of vacation, personal, and sick time to be used at the individual's discretion. Within reason, offering flexible work schedules has become very popular as well. Whether it's getting the kids off to school, or beating a rough commute, the balance of work time and play time become more harmonious, diminishing stress in the workplace.

Make Employees Feel Appreciated. Too often, employee's efforts go unnoticed. There's nothing like being told from the boss, "Peter, you're doing a great job for us, keep up the good work". A pat on the back from time to time goes a long way. Employee of the month programs, incentive bonuses, or even a discretionary day off makes an employee feel appreciated. Under appreciation, or at least feeling that you're under appreciated hurts morale and fosters nonproductive work. So don't be shy, let them know how you feel.

Treat Every Prospective Employee as an Individual. Your company's policy states that each employee starts his or her career with two weeks of paid vacation time. What's even worse is if you don't offer any! The bottom line is, senior professionals, previously or currently afforded three weeks, four weeks or even more vacation time aren't willing to cope with entry-level treatment. Likewise with company vehicles or car allowances, it's hard to part with what you've had for some time. Make accommodations to, at the very least, offer benefits complimentary to what they're currently or were previously provided.

Career Path. More so with junior and mid level employees, knowing what they can expect long term

is important to them. Career paths should be outlined and continually updated as talents and capabilities progress. Without this, one can often feel like a butterfly in a windstorm, being tossed to-and-fro with no real vision or end goal. Semi-annual or even quarterly reviews are desired more so than the typical yearly review. At these meetings, learn more about what each individual is striving for and what actions they're taking to accomplish their goals. This is a great time for you to assess your staff's desires, and future aspirations.

Seek the Help of a Professional. The lack of available talent has kept everyone from CAD technicians to senior project managers working in overdrive. If you're relying on newspaper articles, internet postings, or word-of-mouth recruiting to fill your pressing needs, your opportunities are likely going unnoticed. Top performers just don't have the time to search for a new position. This is one reason why it is critical to seek the help of a recruitment consultant with specific knowledge of your industry. Recruiters specializing in the design, construction, and environmental industries have a firm grasp on who's likely to move and who's staying put. They have intimate knowledge of what passive candidates are currently afforded, their needs, desires, and criteria for change. They can assist you in identifying, attracting, and hiring passive job seekers who, without the help of a recruiter, would likely go unknown.

Too often companies lose valued employees because of uncompetitive salaries and/or benefits, a fuzzy future, lack of growth potential, or simply because they don't feel empowered. These problem areas can be easily addressed, and save you the frustrations of searching for replacements. Your radar must be sharp to identify these problems before they arise however, or you may end up losing your company's most important assets of all.

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