

It's Time to Rethink Your Recruitment Tactics

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Examining the Construction Labor Market and Expanding Your Workforce.

Construction offers a bright and promising future for both business owners and workers. With steady national residential and nonresidential construction spending and a healthy stream of new bid opportunities, employees can enjoy healthy job security while companies pursue growth.

But filling job openings to meet the demand for new projects remains a significant industrywide challenge that can impede business growth. To gain a competitive edge in today's labor market, companies must refine their hiring practices and implement innovative methods to attract candidates and retain employees.

THE STATE OF THE LABOR MARKET

Construction talent – especially skilled talent – is in high demand. In the Associated General Contractors of America's 2023 Workforce Survey Analysis, 85% of surveyed companies reported job openings. Of those, 88% mentioned they're having a tough time filling positions, especially in craft roles.

The issue is partly driven by an aging skilled workforce heading into retirement and a prevalent trend of young people steered toward a four-year college education over vocational programs. Over the years, this led to intense competition for construction talent, and stories of workers leaving jobs for as little as a 25-cent pay raise became increasingly common.



But a promising change could help balance the labor market: Generation Z is taking an interest in trade careers. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reported that the number of students studying construction has increased by 23% since 2018.

FOCUS ON THE CANDIDATE'S EXPERIENCE

With the current state of the labor market favoring job seekers, hiring companies need to invest in ensuring the candidate's experience is as smooth as possible. Reducing barriers and common frustrations with the application process can help increase the number of applicants and, in turn, your pool of qualified talent.

SHORT & SIMPLE APPLICATIONS

Applicants often spend hours upon hours of their valuable time job hunting. If your application is too long or complex, a candidate may decide the opportunity isn't worth their time and never finish applying. After all, countless other companies are looking to hire and don't require answering long-form questions.

Before posting an opening, determine your deal-breakers for the role. Narrow down screening questions to capture your must-have qualifications, and be prepared to ask more in-depth questions about the applicant's background during the interview.

Similar advice rings true for your job descriptions. By keeping the descriptions concise and straightforward, potential candidates can better determine if they'd be a good fit for the role and enter the interview process with clear expectations about the company and position.

REDUCE LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Construction jobs attract workers from diverse backgrounds, including many who are not native English speakers. These candidates may be highly qualified for the roles your company needs, but language barriers in the application or interview process can discourage them from applying. By making job postings and applications accessible in multiple languages, businesses can support the growth of a multilingual and multicultural workforce.

Canyon State Electric, an Arizona-based electrical construction firm, took a proactive approach to minimize language barriers for its employees, many of whom are Spanish speakers. The company not only posts job ads in multiple languages, but also employs a bilingual recruiter as well as human resources (HR) personnel to facilitate effective communication across the most commonly spoken languages on their jobsites.

"You have to meet people where they're at, and having a bilingual recruiter was one skill we knew we needed to have. We're giving our team members an additional resource that they can use to get their problems solved," said Vince DiGuglielmo, director of strategy at Canyon State Electric.

EXPLORE NEW RECRUITMENT PLATFORMS

Traditional online job boards like Indeed, Glassdoor, and even LinkedIn are highly valuable for reaching prospective candidates. But to expand your search for qualified workers, consider leveraging social media in your recruitment efforts. As the workforce increasingly includes tech-savvy millennials and Gen Z workers, companies can find opportunities to catch their attention on platforms they regularly use, such as Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Reddit.

THOROUGHLY SCREEN CANDIDATES

Canyon State Electric receives hundreds of job applications each month. Amid the flood of applicants, only a handful will be qualified for the roles they're applying for. Determining which candidates have the qualifications for a journeyman electrician versus a wireman IV position can be challenging without an interview. Still, you want to be mindful of respecting people's time by only scheduling meetings with applicants who realistically meet your job criteria.

"We're putting solutions in place to have candidates predisposition themselves so we can cut out a lot of that guesswork and get to those candidates we need to contact faster. With our ATS, we've created an internal rating system that ranks candidate skill levels based on their self-reporting," said DiGuglielmo. "You go from looking at 400 applications to looking at 20."

An applicant tracking system (ATS) is a modern recruiting tool that streamlines candidate management in a centralized system. Teams can leverage this tool to support all the recruiting methods we've discussed so far, but one of its most important uses is helping hiring teams narrow down qualified candidates.

According to DiGuglielmo, Canyon State Electric's hiring team is still involved in verifying applicant qualifications, but the ATS technology enables them to build a short list in a fraction of the time. Additionally, past applications are saved in the ATS and available the next time a role opens up, granting the team access to a prescreened talent pool.

MAKE IT MORE THAN A JOB: EMPHASIZE CAREER BUILDING

Construction professionals take great pride in their skills and the projects they complete. However, numerous workforce studies have shown that companies that fail to provide employees with a clear career path and advancement opportunities are more likely to lose their employees.

Once you've put in the hard work to build a strong workforce, don't let a lack of professional development opportunities put you back at square one. You can't focus on recruitment and ignore retention.


ESTABLISH SPECIFIC MILESTONES & EXPECTATIONS

Each role should have a clear advancement track that both employees and managers can follow to determine skill and career progression. This path should include milestones that employees can reference to track their daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual progress.

A performance management system helps record and monitor personalized skill development for employees. With a clear road map to promotions and higher pay, employees can take more control over their careers at your company. During performance reviews, employees and supervisors can use the system to have data-backed conversations about job performance. For example, Canyon State Electric does this by providing employees with a list of required skills and reevaluating them quarterly based on the outlined skills list. Once employees check all the boxes, they can advance to the next level.

INCREASE ACCESS TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESOURCES

One way to offer employees more control over their career trajectories is by empowering them to renew certifications and upskill online. Learning management systems (LMS) provide a centralized learning portal where employees can access required safety training, track upcoming certification expiration dates, and enroll in additional courses to learn new skills. This investment benefits both employees and the company: Employees advance their careers through access to training

resources, while the company can rely on its existing skilled workforce to fill roles requiring specialized skills instead of recruiting new personnel. 



About the Author

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