

Navigating Workforce Challenges: Insights for Construction Companies

Written by: Greg Belpomme, Construction Partner, Heron Wolf

Engaging with a majority of construction companies across the U.S. reveals a common theme - the perpetual need for skilled professionals. From the long-standing need for estimators to licensed professional engineers amid a surge in design-build projects to project managers well-versed in state building regulations, the demand for specialized talent is palpable.

The prevalent struggle to attract the right talent often stems from an idealized hiring approach. Recognizing the inherent difficulties in finding a perfect match becomes crucial, especially in the face of the well-documented skill shortage in the construction and engineering sector. So, how can companies ensure a robust workforce to meet the burgeoning demands of the U.S. construction market?

Reconsidering the Perfect Hire Myth: Embracing Diversity

Dispelling the notion of an ideal hire is the first step. People come in diverse shapes and formats, making the search for a perfect match elusive. Attempting to replicate the attributes of a departed employee, while well-intentioned, can inadvertently lead to disappointment. While certain projects may necessitate specific qualifications, the scarcity of such individuals creates a competitive landscape where the highest bidder prevails. A more viable alternative lies in hiring for succession, considering individuals with the right work ethic or personality, and providing the necessary support for their professional growth.



Think about hiring someone with a bit less experience but who can learn and adapt. People often say they don't have time to train someone, but isn't that similar to not having the right person in the role? You end up spending time covering for the missing skills. Furthermore, when companies claim they don't have time to train, it can scare off candidates. It gives the vibe that personal growth isn't a big deal, and that might turn people away.

Internal Promotions: A Dual Solution

Internal promotions not only contribute to increased job satisfaction and loyalty but also create opportunities for junior positions. This, in turn, facilitates easier recruitment for these roles, addressing staffing needs more efficiently.

Strategic Engagement with Local Universities: Shaping the Future Workforce

The surge in demand for junior-level positions has created a competitive landscape, with candidates in high demand. To counter this, forging partnerships with local universities is crucial. Having individuals who understand and embody your company culture speak on your behalf can inspire the next generation to join the industry.

Authentic Employer Branding: What Sets You Apart?

In a market saturated with commonplace statements on job boards, companies must delve into what truly distinguishes them as employers of choice. While accolades, project abundance, and market longevity hold value, the real differentiator lies in understanding and highlighting what resonates with employees on a personal level.

Stop Writing Job Descriptions and Start Writing Job Adverts

When crafting job advertisements, make sure it's being seen as an "advert" and not as a to-do list. For instance, if you're seeking a project manager, assume they understand their role and what the day-to-day duties include. Listing every detail may not attract the caliber of professional you truly desire. Instead, delve into what would motivate someone content in their current role to consider a change. In today's skill-short market, a mere list of required skills lacks the persuasive edge needed to entice top talent. Don't just outline skills – illuminate how joining your team can propel their career forward. Get creative, shape a compelling narrative, and highlight why your company stands out as an irresistible career move.

Retention as a Priority: A Holistic Approach

Retention is as pivotal as hiring. Conversations with existing staff about what they appreciate and areas for improvement

can guide efforts to minimize turnover. Strategic training and development initiatives not only ensure a steady flow of skilled professionals but also foster loyalty and a deep understanding of the company's ethos.


Balancing Experience and Training Investment

Consider exploring candidates with slightly less experience but the potential for rapid adaptation. The argument against this approach might be the perceived lack of time for training. However, not investing in training is akin to not having the right person in the role. In both scenarios, time is spent compensating for the absence of a well-suited individual.

It's crucial to recognize that when companies express a reluctance to train, it can unintentionally discourage potential candidates. This reluctance may convey a message that personal growth and development are not prioritized, potentially deterring individuals seeking opportunities for professional advancement.

Navigating the "Seesaw Effect"

Career development is akin to maintaining a delicate equilibrium, where the exchange of skills, knowledge, and contributions with the support and development provided by the company forms a dynamic interplay. Envision a seesaw with a 100-pound object on one end, symbolizing an individual's initial skills, and a 400-pound object on the other, representing the company's training and support. As skills grow, the individual's side gains weight, creating a reciprocal relationship akin to the seesaw's balance. Yet, with increased skills, the seesaw may shift, signaling potential imbalance and feelings of unfulfillment. Identifying and rectifying these disparities becomes crucial for both parties. Adjustments, including salary considerations, external training, and role adaptation, contribute to restoring equilibrium. The pursuit of a middle ground fosters a sustained, balanced relationship between companies and employees, promoting continuous growth and fulfillment in the professional journey.

Remember, hiring success comes in many different formats. Exploring different methods often allows companies to continue to progress their projects whilst employing the right team. Flexibility often favors those on the hunt for new personnel and retaining them. Many successful firms attest to this approach, witnessing longevity and growth as individuals progress from entry-level roles to leadership positions. Investing in the growth and well-being of employees, companies can foster loyalty and create a workforce that understands, appreciates, and contributes to the company's success. 



About the Author

Greg Belpomme is a civil construction business partner and consultant for [Heron Wolf](#) and specializes in staffing and employee retention for U.S.-based construction companies. Greg's specialty lies in supporting companies that secure projects, aiding them in becoming employers of choice, and developing robust hiring and retention strategies. Specializing in construction and commercial real estate, Heron Wolf delivers people-oriented, data-driven solutions for staffing, retention, succession planning, benefits analysis, and career development.

Any views and opinions expressed in this article may or may not reflect the views and opinions of the Construction Management Association of America (CMAA). By publishing this piece, CMAA is not expressing endorsement of the individual, the article, or their association, organization, or company.