

Making It Rain in a Labor Drought

How partnerships & employee development can change your employment forecast

BY MARDEE BILLINGSLEY

Whether you have experienced dwindling employment applications, a lack of management-level talent, and/or delayed or canceled work yourself, you've likely already felt the widening shortage of skilled workers in some capacity. With more students being pushed to pursue bachelor's degrees for white-collar jobs and the growing number of construction projects nationwide, recruiting a skilled workforce for your business is becoming increasingly challenging. In fact, the Associated General Contractors of America reported that 70% of construction companies nationwide are having difficulty finding qualified workers.

Not having enough workers on hand may cause long-term harm to your business, as you may not be able to effectively bid on projects. To survive the skilled labor drought, your business must adapt to modern recruiting and workforce trends, which revolve heavily around training and education. Below are a few strategies that can aid in recruiting—and retaining—a skilled workforce.

JOIN & EDUCATE

Joining technical organizations gives your business a platform to directly engage with a broad range of motivated individuals. From connecting with your



local labor union to teaming up on national recruitment efforts, there are numerous technical organizations to join that can help build a pipeline of talent.

Equally important is committing your company to educating people both within and outside of your current workforce. For example, Tremco Roofing and Building Maintenance and its affiliate, Weatherproofing Technologies Inc. (WTI), are official business partners of SkillsUSA.

This nationwide high-school program works to ensure that the United States

has a skilled workforce by educating high school students about rewarding careers in the trades. Through this partnership, Tremco Roofing and WTI can connect with students across the country and introduce them to roofing as a profession.

By having a dialogue with the next generation of professionals, Tremco Roofing and WTI can answer questions and tackle common misconceptions about trade jobs. Representatives discuss the demands of the job and potential growth opportunities and earnings.

Students are pleased to discover that, with proper training, they can develop the physical and mental acumen for the job, as well as an exciting future, where earnings start at \$16 per hour and can amount to as much as \$70 per hour, depending on experience level, location and specialty. Empowering tens of thousands of students with this knowledge helps mitigate persistent stigmas about career projections within trade industries.

INVEST IN EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

Considering how quickly technology is affecting the way the world and the construction industry operate, it's reassuring for skilled workers to know that their employer is invested in developing their skills for the future.

Simultaneously, investing in employee development will add long-term value for your business, as it provides your workforce with the knowledge needed to perform high-level tasks. Employee development efforts can range from one-day training sessions to full-scale programs that provide entry-level employees with a direct path to management.

One compelling initiative is WTI's Roofing Individuals Succeed through Education (RISE) program, which includes undergraduate degree and apprenticeship programs. Through a partnership with the University of Akron in Akron, Ohio, WTI employees can enroll in online college courses that they complete remotely whenever it fits into their schedules.

Employees are eligible to apply for the program after 90 days of employment and may enroll in the spring, summer or fall semesters. Students begin in the Associate of Science in Construction Management track. Upon completion, they can transition seamlessly to the Bachelor of Organizational Supervision in Construction Management, if they wish to do so.

This employee development initiative is uniquely successful because it meshes with an employee's lifestyle at no cost and with no strings attached. Employees have no obligation to pay tuition back at any time or commit to long-term employment. Additionally, employees who decide not to pursue a degree may transfer that benefit to a dependent.

WTI's RISE Apprenticeship program appeals to those seeking advanced opportunities in the roofing industry without pursuing a college degree. Apprentices receive up to 4,000 hours of paid, on-the-job training as well as 392 hours of online classroom instruction. Upon completion, students earn an apprenticeship completion certificate, which allows them to work anywhere in the U.S., and up to 17 college credit hours to use if they decide they want a degree. This federally accredited program is recognized in all 50 states and U.S. territories.

PRIORITIZE DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Diversity and inclusion should be a cornerstone of your recruitment efforts. Because 88% of industry workers are white males, emphasizing recruiting and retaining minorities and women is critical to attracting more skilled workers. In addition, diverse thought drives innovation.

When the people in a company's workforce bring all different experiences to the job, their wide range of perspectives can be leveraged to determine the best solutions for any challenge in a project. Each worker's unique background may spark new ideas or lead the team to consider aspects of a project that may have otherwise been overlooked.

Making a coordinated effort to reach diverse populations beyond traditional recruitment strategies is a step in the right direction to expand your applicant pool, but you must also ensure your company has a safe and welcoming environment. This includes having and enforcing

antidiscrimination and harassment policies, being stocked with safety attire and equipment that will fit any worker properly, and offering paid parental leave. These protections make careers in the construction industry more attractive to populations who are traditionally underrepresented in the industry.

To be actively involved in advancing diversity and inclusion efforts, Tremco Roofing and WTI are founding sponsors of National Women in Roofing (NWIR), a volunteer-based organization that provides educational and advancement opportunities for women in the roofing industry. Being involved in NWIR enables the sponsoring companies to be leaders in providing mentoring, education, networking and employment opportunities that will shape inclusion efforts across the industry.

The partnership also allows Tremco Roofing and WTI to have direct interactions with women regarding the challenges they face in the industry and what can be done to make the workplace more accommodating. Emphasizing diversity and inclusion has undoubtedly expanded the companies' reputation and reach—there has been a 95% increase in hiring over the last year.

Ultimately, investing in the growth of your employees is investing in the growth of your business. Especially in a labor drought, skilled workers will seek high-quality employers that support their long-term career aspirations.

Embracing partnerships, education, employee development and diversity will open multiple avenues for skilled workers to learn about careers in trades and find their way to your business. **CBO**

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