

Recruiting and Retaining Qualified Building Enclosure Employees: Challenges and Strategies for Success

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AS THE FIELD of building enclosure consulting has grown in recent years, demand for professionals who specialize in designing and assessing building enclosures has increased considerably. This growth in demand, in combination with an insufficient supply of skilled professionals, has led to significant challenges in hiring and retaining qualified employees. This article outlines key hiring and retention challenges and offers strategies to overcome them.

CHALLENGE: SHORTAGE OF QUALIFIED PROFESSIONALS

One of the key employment challenges facing the building enclosure consulting profession is the lack of relevant training and education available at high schools, trade schools, colleges, and universities. In addition, according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics,¹ the 2008 recession had a significant impact on the construction industry. Many projects were put on hold, resulting in a decline in companies' ability to train staff. Consequently, many professionals who had hoped to pursue careers in the building enclosure industry sought employment in other industries. The resulting gap has forced employers to train less-experienced staff, which presents challenges for employers as often they are forced to use less-experienced staff to deliver projects. The 2020 pandemic further impacted a construction industry that had not yet returned to pre-recession form. An Associated General Contractors of America (AGC) study that found 68% of contractors had seen at least one project canceled as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.²

Strategies

There are multiple strategies to find and recruit qualified candidates. Firms should establish partnerships with educational institutions to create apprenticeships and internships that provide a pipeline of talent and give students exposure to building enclosure consulting. Attending school career fairs and providing scholarships or grants can create an "employer of choice" company brand presence at architectural, engineering, and construction schools. Continue to advance and expand your network of qualified professionals. Establish a strong online presence in various professional associations and groups and provide interesting content about significant projects or complex problems that need to be solved.

CHALLENGE: COMPETITION FOR TALENT

Building enclosure consulting firms must compete with other employers for the best talent. The technology industry, for example, often offers high salaries, innovative technology, and exciting work environments that appeal to many candidates. Some architectural candidates

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may feel that designing and investigating building enclosures limits their creativity and seek employment with companies offering a broader array of design opportunities. Likewise, professionals within the construction industry often want to work on larger-scale, new construction projects that garner a lot of attention and may find the consulting side of the business less glamorous.

Strategies

Strategies to overcome the talent-competition challenge include the following. Develop a strong employer brand, offer competitive salaries and benefits, and provide opportunities for professional development and growth to attract and retain the best talent. Create project profiles to show candidates the work they will be a part of. Create career path guidelines for all positions to highlight future growth opportunities in the company. Succession planning, where firm ownership or individuals develop and train employees with the intention of them taking leadership of the firm, plays a pivotal role in retaining employees, as it demonstrates to employees that the company is supporting their individual career growth. Diversity, equity, and inclusion-focused employee resource groups contribute to company retention efforts by improving employee engagement and reducing turnover at all levels.

CHALLENGE: CHANGING WORKFORCE EXPECTATIONS

Workers entering the current job market seek purposeful work, work-life balance, flexibility, and a supportive work environment. Building enclosure consulting is often demanding, and tight deadlines and high client expectations can

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Essential Recruiting Practices

for Hiring Managers to Attract Candidates

1

Candidate engagement: Rewrite your old, stale job descriptions and add some sizzle. Talk about the company culture and key differentiators that make your company unique.

2

Candidate experience: Make sure each candidate knows they are special. Even if you don't hire them today, creating a positive impression can leave the door open to hiring them in the future.

3

Employment branding: What is your employment brand? When you are speaking with candidates, you should know what your employee value proposition is and be able to cite examples of why a candidate should choose your company over a competitor. Use your social media accounts to tell your candidate audience your company story, instead of just posting open positions.

4

Updated career website: Make sure that your career website is consistent with the defined employment brand and that the content you are providing inspires candidates to apply.

5

Partnerships: Create and maintain open lines of communication with both the internal recruiter and hiring manager and ensure that you have alignment on the skills and qualifications, compensation, and hiring process for open positions. The hiring managers and their teams may also know of top candidates in their professional networks and should be encouraged to recommend these individuals to the internal recruiter. One option is to hold "pizza and a referral" lunches where hiring managers and their team members brainstorm names of candidates to relay to the recruiter.

create a stressful work environment that may lead to burnout and high turnover rates.

Strategies

Here are some strategies to overcome workforce-expectation challenges. Develop a culture of purpose, provide work-life balance, offer flexible remote or hybrid work arrangements, and create a supportive, inclusive work environment. Keep your team at optimal staffing levels to minimize burnout and fatigue caused by team members bearing an excessive workload. One creative solution is to proactively anticipate open positions on your team through a series of budgeted headcount/project meetings prior to the new year. This act alone will make your recruiting efforts more proactive and less

reactive, which in turn will shorten the time that it takes to fill a position and prevent employee workloads from becoming unbalanced.

CHALLENGE: PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TECHNOLOGY

Professional development is crucial for building enclosure professionals. However, it may be challenging for employers to provide the necessary training and development opportunities. This challenge may be especially daunting for smaller firms with fewer resources.

Advanced technological platforms such as building information modeling (BIM), virtual reality, augmented reality, and drone and thermal imaging are increasingly becoming

critical tools for building enclosure professionals. While the demand for professionals with experience in these technologies is high, the pool of qualified candidates is limited. Moreover, most technological systems require ongoing training and development, which can be expensive and time consuming.

Strategies

Strategies for overcoming the professional development challenge are straightforward. Invest in helping employees participate in professional development programs such as the IIBEC International Convention and Trade

Show, IIBEC symposiums, other conferences, workshops, and online training on the latest technologies, code compliance, regulations, and best practices. Consider volunteer organizations where staff can trade time for training to offset costs. In addition, provide opportunities for on-the-job learning, mentoring, and coaching to help employees develop the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in their roles.

CHALLENGE: RETENTION

Retention is a significant challenge in our increasingly competitive industry. As more firms add building enclosure services to diversify

their service offerings, building enclosure professionals have more opportunities in the marketplace, making it harder to retain qualified employees.

Strategies

Effective retention strategies are a multi-faceted approach that makes your employees feel appreciated and includes the following. Develop a culture of recognition and appreciation, providing regular feedback and recognition for employee contributions to encourage employee engagement. Initiate an internal mobility program that encourages employees to apply for internal positions they may be interested in. This type of program helps retain good employees by giving them opportunities to advance their careers within your company instead of looking elsewhere. An additional retention strategy is to invest in education and training programs to develop employees and keep them moving forward in their careers. This will also help keep employees actively engaged and is a true win-win for the company and the employee.

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CHALLENGE: SALARY AND BENEFITS

A combination of competitive salaries and benefits will help attract and retain the best talent. However, smaller practices may find it

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challenging to compete against larger firms due in part to a lack of information (salary surveys) and financial resources to offer competitive pay and benefits.

Strategies

There are several strategies for overcoming the salary and benefits challenge. Create clear career pathways by providing professional development and growth opportunities. Established companies hiring in today's market have noted an increase in candidate salary requirements year over year. The single greatest compensation problem facing many US companies is the difference in salary that exists between their current employees and passive candidates that are considering a move and may be on the open market; most employees are "free agents" in that there are rarely employment contracts for W-2 workers in the US. This discrepancy, often referred to as salary compression, can cripple your recruiting efforts if your salary ranges are too low to attract top-tier candidates. Conversely, if you hire new employees and pay them more than current employees, it can create negative feelings among your existing staff and contribute to an organization's retention problems. To help address this issue, companies should conduct salary surveys semiannually or annually (or use third-party companies that perform industry surveys) and use the survey data to align compensation with current market rates where possible. Recruiters often lead with the promise of higher salaries. If your firm's salaries are in line with other firms competing for talent, this may help keep competitors' recruiters away from your team, assist with overall retention, and allow you and your company to attract talented candidates with solid market offers without the fear of alienating your current team.

CONCLUSION

Given today's soft candidate market, companies must follow best hiring and employee retention practices to differentiate themselves from other employers. There is no single "silver bullet" approach that will attract the right candidates and convince your strongest employees to stay. Rather, employers need multiple strategies—such as creating alignment around practices that streamline interviewing processes, calibrating growth opportunities for the position, clearly defining roles and responsibilities, and offering competitive compensation and benefits—to overcome employment challenges. 

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