ast month in part 2 of our series we discussed several elements that should be considered during the layout and design of a new wall panel plant, and production assembly line. In part 3 of this series we will cover personnel hiring and training; and will look at the techniques that can be used to hire, train and keep the very best production, staff, and management personnel.

An employee has the potential to become either your greatest or worst business asset! Hiring the best people available is one of the most difficult aspects of any business venture. Because the success and growth of your business is dependent on the people who surround you, this difficult task should be a top priority.

Hiring the best people should be a defined process; just like any quality control process you would set up when assembling components on the production line. As a new business owner, you will quickly find that labor costs are a significant expense to your business. After tracking the costs of interviewing, hiring, training, and providing wages and benefits, your goal should be to retain employees.

As with most things, your hiring process will require a delicate balance between securing the right amount of labor and finding the right worker for a particular job. This can be very challenging! However, there are a number of hiring best practices to guide you. There are common factors to consider when recruiting your staff. Make sure you are clear on your requirements before you start, then make sure you know enough about the person you’ve chosen before offering them a job!

Here is a “best hiring practices” checklist:

1. Prepare a written job description—before you do anything else. This should include the following:
   a. Function: What do you want to achieve at that workstation?
   b. Process: What are the steps required for completing the workstation task?
   c. Responsibilities: What additional duties will an employee be accountable for when at their workstation?
   d. Qualification Standards: What are the necessary skills to perform the workstation task?

2. Choose how and where to advertise. Choices include:
   a. Websites, in your shop window, recommendations from current employees, local newspapers, trade magazines/journals, staffing agencies, job fairs.
   b. Process: What are the steps required for completing the workstation task?
   c. Responsibilities: What additional duties will an employee be accountable for when at their workstation?
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3. Screen your applicants thoroughly. Have a short standard set of questions for each individual cutting, detailing, and assembly process.

Once the classroom training is completed, each new employee (including management and design personnel) spends one full day observing production at each work station. At this point in the training, new employees should have a solid plant-wide understanding of the process flow; and the fundamental requirements and quality control standards expected when manufacturing wall panels! Next the new employee is positioned on his/her permanent workstation for on-the-job training with a qualified production worker.

There are many ways to approach training your new workforce. Don’t hesitate to experiment with different training methods and involve supervisors and other managers to share their feedback on what works and what doesn’t.

Tracking Performance

You may find that appraising the performance of new hires is helpful as a way to track progress and whether that person is a good fit for your operation. I hire new employees with the understanding that they are on probation for the first 90 days. During that 90 day probation period, a new employee will have three performance reviews; the first is at ten days (you should have a very good impression of an employee’s performance after the first ten days), the second is at 60 days, and the third is at 90 days. The performance characteristics I evaluate are:

- Quality/quantity of work
- Safety/housekeeping
- Motivation/attitude
- Knowledge of work

and design personnel are also required to complete this training. A good practice is to have a training program for each employee that covers both production methods and quality control procedures. The production portion should outline step-by-step processes and procedures required to cut, detail and assemble exterior, interior, and “specials” wall panels to +/-1/16”! It should be simple to understand, and clearly define each individual cutting, detailing, and assembly process.

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The article discusses compensation in the context of 6- and 12-month personnel evaluations. It recommends having a defined process for achieving higher levels of compensation. Key points include:

- **Interest rates from 0% to 7.9%, and periods from 12 months:**
- **Seniority does not always equate to project success.**
- **Time does cost money:**
- **Hiring, training, and compensation process that can be replicated gives you less exposure to employee attrition:**
- **Minutes of a 2-3 minute labor cost:**

The article also mentions the importance of **problem solving/communication.** It states that employees should be evaluated on different criteria for the 6- and 12-month personnel evaluations. It also recommends having more detailed performance evaluation criteria for the 6- and 12-month personnel evaluations. Also, the hourly and staff employees should be evaluated on different subjects than management. The article provides examples of how to achieve higher levels of compensation.

The article concludes with a reminder that it costs a company too much money to keep marginal performers! Incidentally, it holds true for 60 or 90 days. Remember, it costs a company him/her go; don't prolong the agony and expense! The same applies to 6- and 12-month personnel evaluations.

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