

"How to Hire & Keep the BEST Employees" by Barbara Voss

When a company is ready to hire a designer, but can't find anyone qualified, employers typically will broaden their advertising strategies and consider hiring an entry-level person. Before you make this decision, first consider the hiring process itself. Second, make a plan for training. And third, think about how to keep your new employee from leaving.

HIRING ENTRY-LEVEL DESIGNERS

If you place a well-written classified ad in the local paper, you should draw a large assortment of local CAD operators. Believe it or not, you may start seeing too many applicants! Out of the fifty résumés you do receive, you may find an experienced truss designer in the group, but who will be sorting through your ad responses? And do you have time to spend a week or two talking to fifty inexperienced CAD operators?

When hiring, managers can easily spend too much time away from their own job duties. It takes time to read résumés, answer telephone inquiries and interview scores of entry-level people who are "interested in getting into the truss business," but who do not have the skills necessary for the job.

So, what is the most efficient way to hire an entry-level candidate? If you place an ad in Sunday's paper, expect to be busy with the responses on Monday and Tuesday. Apply effective time management skills and arrange your schedule so you are not returning lots of telephone calls to unknown people. Plan to screen most of your responses over the telephone by asking a few pertinent questions. If you don't have time to ask these questions, assign someone else to this task.

An initial phone call with a job applicant shouldn't take more than five minutes. First, determine their qualifications by asking if they are currently working and to describe their general job duties. Second, find out how much experience they have by asking how long have they been at their current position. Third, ask for their salary requirements. Before you set a time for an individual to meet with you, you might also want to make sure that he or she is indeed looking for a full time permanent job and that the location of your company is within an acceptable commuting distance for the applicant.

Whether you are asking the questions, or it's someone else's responsibility, don't agree to meet with everyone who calls and don't ask everyone to send a résumé. Use telephone screening as a way to cut down on paperwork and interviewing.

But don't delay! Even though you may generate a lot of interest with your ad on Sunday, the good applicants will be hired quickly. Job hunters answer a lot of ads and yours is only one of

several they will be pursuing. When you do speak to a potentially good applicant, set a time for him or her to meet with you in person that week.

TRAINING ENTRY-LEVEL EMPLOYEES

While entry-level candidates are seemingly inexpensive to hire, they can be expensive to train. Training a new employee will take time—the time it takes for the new employee to learn his or her job and the time involved on the part of the trainer. One of my candidates left his position because he was tired of training entry-level CAD operators to become truss designers. He worked for a plate manufacturer and traveled throughout his region training new designers how to use his company's software. He diligently explained the process, assisted with designs and encouraged these entry-level people, only to see many of his trainees quit. He eventually burned out of training and quit himself.

Whether you are hiring one or several entry-level employees, it is essential to make a plan for training, follow-up, support and evaluation. Consider who will be doing the training. Will the added responsibility take away from his or her job responsibilities? Will the as-signed trainer consider this trainee a disruption or will he or she view this as an opportunity to develop skills in management? Whoever is assigned to train needs a plan and must know that it takes time and patience to develop a good entry-level, trainable person into a seasoned professional. Whoever is doing the training is probably very skilled at designing, but don't forget to educate the trainer to be an effective teacher! Some basics to remember are (a) the trainees' work is as important as your own; (b) trainees make mistakes, but mistakes need correction—not punishment; and (c) a trainer needs effective time management so he or she is not burned out by the demands of the new employee.

Remember to support your trainer, just as you expect him or her to support their trainees. If you are doing the training yourself, keep in mind how you would like to be treated if you were in the trainee's shoes.

KEEPING AN ENTRY-LEVEL EMPLOYEE

Two reasons stand out more than any others when it comes to why people leave new positions: salary and recognition. Don't forget to give your entry-level employees regular raises, so that their salaries are competitive with their co-workers. Once your new employee has the same skills and responsibility as long-term workers, they need to be paid accordingly. In addition, if they have acquired skills and are ready for more responsibility, don't forget to provide that either.

Hiring, training and keeping entry-level employees can be the way to staff your office with long-term, committed people. And in this competitive marketplace, we all know they are hard to find.

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