

STRUCTURAL BUILDING COMPONENTS MAGAZINE

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Production Management – Hiring & Retaining Production Employees by John Herring

It was appropriate that at BCMC 2002 I presented a seminar on Hiring and Retaining Production employees, because at A-1 Roof Truss, we have recently moved our wood and steel truss production operations to a new location nearly 90 miles from its old site. In working through a transition of this magnitude, I have had to recruit new employees, evaluate the description and requirements of each position and work to create a certain culture in the new facility that will help to bring us success in the long term. I am not a personnel expert, but after spending the last 30 years in the structural building components industry, I have gained much expertise on how to efficiently select production staff as well as how to retain them. I've not uncovered a secret to this effort; rather, I have determined the appropriate hiring process for my company and have committed to a set of procedures to follow before making the decision to hire.

WE ARE WHO WE HIRE

I have always used the same analogy to describe the process for hiring and keeping employees; compare your company's well being to that of your own physical fitness. Two questions that I asked the audience right away were: "Are We Physically Fit? Why Aren't We Fit?" There are a countless number of excuses for not keeping our bodies in good health: too busy, too hard, not enough discipline, no motivation or incentive, too many distractions and temptations. Consider what your company would be like if you gave the same excuses and cut the same corners. Most likely, your company would be in poor health as well. Remember that we are who we hire and if we are sloppy and careless about choosing employees, it will eventually be a reflection on our business.

ACCOUNT FOR POSITION DIVERSITY

First, it is important to define the structure of positions that we might find in a typical truss manufacturing operation: professional engineers, table leaders, secretaries, CFO/accounting personnel, fork-lift operators, truck drivers, sales personnel, maintenance workers, computer and manual saw operators, IS/computer staff, design technicians and manual truss stackers. As you can see, this list represents a wide range of diverse jobs that each require specific skill sets and other criteria. What often happens when we don't account for the diversity of these positions is we end up hiring someone who doesn't quite fit the job description. This eventually

SCORE CARD for My Company's Health		
Check YES or NO, to each of the following. Answer YES only if you ARE following these procedures for each and EVERY Employee, EVERY TIME you hire.		
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	We have a job description / outline for every position including new hires with physical requirements and work environment conditions stated.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	We produce a "Pay Scale Range" and benefits package.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	We do team hiring.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	We require a minimum of THREE interviews.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	We do intelligence testing.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	We perform a Personality Test, for "Job Fit."
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	We do a "ProForm."
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	We perform "Jobs Skills Tests."
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	We accompany ALL of our new hires for drug testing.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	We have a disciplined hiring and retaining culture in our company that we are totally satisfied with.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	We have programs in place for perpetual recruiting and hiring.
<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	We have programs in place for retaining good employees.

leads to firing that person or having to live with employees who are not working up to your standards. This is the least efficient way to approach hiring personnel.

WHY WE NEED TO HIRE

Next, let's look at the most common reasons that we need to hire: employees quit or get fired, company growth, injuries, promotions, taking a leave of absence, or going on vacation. The more in tune you are to these reasons, the more prepared you will be when the time comes to recruit new employees. Where do we look when we are trying to attract new hires? Today we see options that range from the old newspaper ad standby to headhunters and prison recruiting programs. It is important to research every possible avenue of recruitment to ensure we have thoroughly searched all possibilities.

My challenge to the audience was to evaluate their hiring culture by filling out a "Score Card". I created a card with a list of steps to take before making a new hire. I asked each person to answer each question on the report card honestly, thinking about every position and every hire. If you cannot honestly answer "yes" to each of these questions, you may want to consider adjusting your hiring culture.

TOOLS FOR THE TRADE

Now that you've identified some areas in which your company can improve, we can discuss the tools available to you to make the process easier.

- **Job Description/Outline:** Remember the issue of job diversity discussed above? Here is your best opportunity to define different skill requirements for each and every position. Outline the fine specifics of the job: physical requirements like lifting 30 pounds or standing for three hours/day, possessing strong math, logic or reasoning skills, and describing work environment conditions. Every skill that you are looking for in the person you would like to hire for the position should be clear in your mind and the candidate's mind as well.
- **Pay Range & Benefits Package:** Do you really know if your wages are competitive in your local area or region of the country? If not, spend a few hours consulting resources that will clue you in on what everyone else is offering. One excellent resource that I consult regularly is the WTCA Wage and Benefit Survey, published every other year. It helps me to determine whether my wages are competitive with others' in my region. It is essential for you to participate in the survey. We also consult local wage surveys, which serve as benchmarks for local wage scales and benefits packages. Bonus programs are often good incentives, but are obsolete if they are not specific and well managed.
- **Team Hiring:** Team hiring helps my operation immensely. The team should be comprised of either three or four people, each of whom have a different role in the hiring process. This process requires the candidate to come in for three interviews; each member of the hiring team has a session with the candidate. The first, second and third interviews are each meant to be given by people who have different functions in the company but have a sense of what the position requires. One person should be designated to ask the tough questions, another should conduct a very social interview, and the third might give a plant tour. A veto process must be implemented to ensure that if one person on the team disapproves of the candidate, he/she is not selected. The team hiring approach works to filter out people who don't fit the

position.

INTELLIGENCE, PERSONALITY & JOB SKILLS TESTING

In addition to the team hiring approach, other testing methods like intelligence and personality can be helpful tools in the hiring process. We use an intelligence testing method called Wonderlic to screen candidates for skills such as math, reasoning, logic and common sense. This takes 12 timed minutes to complete, but it reveals important information about the tasks that the candidate might excel in or lack aptitude for. I like Andrew Carnegie's quote on staff development: "You develop people like you mine gold: you don't start looking for dirt." This applies to every business; the intelligence test can lead you to a certain skill set that a candidate possesses which you may not have revealed in the interview process.

The personality test is another key indicator of a candidate's capacity for a particular position. In essence what the test examines is where do people derive their energy or passion? Sitting behind a desk? Discovering people's needs? Creating solutions for a problem? The test is designed to inform you of what type of person you are working with and compares that analysis with job profiles. For instance, the personality test that we use at A-1 requires you to input the characteristics for a certain job profile. Based on how the candidate scores on the short test, that data is charted and compared against the job profile data.

Job skills testing is also a crucial part of our hiring and retaining culture. Every position should have a skills test, as there aren't any two jobs in your operation that will have the same skill set. Given that the skills a truck driver and those of a fork lift operator are completely different, you'll want perform a job skills test for aptitude to determine certain strengths and weaknesses.

John Herring is President and CEO of A-1 Roof Trusses. Headquartered in Boynton Beach, FL, A-1 also has a plant in Port St. Lucie, FL and a newly constructed 100,000 sq. ft. plant in Ft. Pierce, FL. Herring has served the structural components industry for over 30 years and has held a number of professional and civic leadership positions at the local, state and national levels. He has served the Wood Truss Council of America as President in 1990 and was on the board for 10 years. In 1999 Mr. Herring was honored by his peers and awarded the WTCA Hall of Fame Award.

You can purchase access this BCMC session, in PowerPoint® format with audio, on the web at www.bcmshow.com. For additional ideas on personnel management presented in this seminar, please read "[From Tribal Chants to Magic Carpets, Even You Can Remedy Production Labor Challenges](#)".

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