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STARTING A RECRUITING REVOLUTION

**INSULATION
SURVEY RESULTS,**
p. 6

**GLOBAL LABELING
CHANGES
TAKE EFFECT,**
p. 12

**DAMAGED
INSULATION
CASE STUDY,**
p. 16

STARTING A RECRUITING REVOLUTION

By Diane Thiel foldt

Take a look at your organization's workforce. If it mirrors the rest of the construction industry, it is weighted toward workers 45 and older, which means you will be facing a "Baby-Boomer drain" as they start to retire in the next 10 years.

Regardless of the demographics within your company, it is vitally important to bring in younger workers—not only to keep positions filled, but to groom your future supervisors and managers, and remain competitive. However, many organizations are finding that it is not easy to attract and recruit young people. Even in a down economy, younger candidates are often not as plentiful and promising as expected. Members of the Millennial generation (born 1977–1998) are out there, and many of them are eager for full-time employment, so why the difficulty in attracting these workers?

The fact is that much of the issue lies with traditional recruiting methods, which are just not effective with the younger generation (and, increasingly, with other generations). It is time to rethink how you recruit workers and radicalize your recruiting and hiring process, which may include

making some tweaks to your entire organization to make it more attractive. You can start with the most basic of building blocks: what, who, where, when, and why.

WHAT Makes Your Organization Attractive?

You may not be able to control the economy or government legislation, but you can control factors that attract top talent. In order to draw good candidates you need to showcase why your organization stands out as a place where people want to work. If you have nothing to showcase, create something that will make you an employer of choice. Your company may not be able to offer free food and fitness amenities, but by offering general flexibility—particularly regarding work schedules and work options such as compressed workweeks—you can attract employees across the board. Other no- or low-cost options for transforming your organization into an employer of choice include setting up a mentoring program, offering plenty of interaction with senior experts and leaders, identifying and promoting strong organizational values, and offering formal or informal learning opportunities.

One direction to take, which follows a national trend, is to become more environmentally and socially conscious as an organization. The insulation industry has a green, environmentally friendly message at its core that should be promoted to this generation's potential employees. Our research shows that 90% of Millennials prefer an ethically and socially responsible employer, and 80% prefer one that is environmentally responsible. Half of those interviewed said they wanted to work for an employer with a good reputation.

Take a look at what your organization offers, or could offer, and consider: Could you become known as the “learning-opportunities” employer? The “green-and-socially-responsible” employer? The “fast-track-to-promotions” employer? Does your company offer mentoring and peer learning? Can high-school graduates create a solid living through your company? Each would give you a strong identity for recruitment messaging—and as an added plus, all are particularly attractive to Millennials. (See the sidebar, “Millennials: Recruiting Messages That Matter” on page 29.)

WHO Should You Focus on Recruiting?

For purposes of planning for the future, we are focusing on Millennials: high-school graduates, college graduates, and younger workers currently in any field (including former members of the armed services). Make no mistake, Millennial candidates are out there. The recession may have caused them to hit the pause button, but they plan on pushing “fast forward” as the economy improves.

At the same time, do not neglect other promising candidates. Baby Boomers are likely to be in the workforce long past the traditional retirement age, and it may serve your company well to make a targeted effort to recruit them. There are plenty of them: Right now, for the first time in more than 60 years, U.S. workers 55 and older outnumber working teenagers.

It is also important to consider another segment of the workforce that is often underrepresented in construction: women. In 2012, women made up 46.9% of U.S. workers, including more than half of management, professional, and related positions. This is clearly not true of the construction industry. Take a look around your company—what percentage of

workers are women? What percentage of leaders? My guess is that the percentage is far below half, since women do not seem to have caught up in historically male fields like construction.

As for the background of candidates, it can be beneficial to skip the skill set requirements. Rather than searching for someone with job experience specific to the position you are filling, hire great talent and then train them. This may increase your costs and time for on-boarding, but this is an investment that will prove to be worthwhile again and again.

WHERE Are You Seeking Younger Workers?

Today's job seekers are reviewing information on organizations before they apply. That means they are checking out your website and Googling mentions of your company in the news, as well as looking at LinkedIn, your Facebook page, Twitter, and maybe even Pinterest. Are you there yet? If not, get there so you can control your image. While you are at it, ensure all your media and postings are fresh, relevant, and interesting.

Be careful not to simply create a corporate Facebook page and Twitter handle and then let them languish—use social media to engage. Comment on relevant LinkedIn groups and message boards, and create online venues for learning about your industry and your company through podcasts and YouTube channels. Get creative—give Facebook friends and other online followers job-seeking tips for your industry, or a salary survey, and show them videos of what it is like to work in your field. Start a blog that will grab their attention and make the job come alive. One industry professional told me, “If they haven't seen a sketch go from the back of a cocktail napkin to a finished structure, then we have to help them gain the passion for what we do.”

Hit refresh on your website, ensuring it is continually updated, visually attractive, includes video clips (such as a day-in-the-life display of how interesting it is to work with you), and has plenty of interactive components (such as the ability to apply for jobs online via the site). Take this a step further by offering open chat rooms or forums by area of expertise or knowledge profiles, or simply a list of experts



who can be contacted for information, answers, and trouble shooting.

Offline, is there another place you should head to recruit? Consider college campuses, technical schools, and high-school vocational programs. If you think college grads are not interested in the construction industry, think again. Approximately 1/3 of Millennials are unemployed or underemployed, and owe an average of \$26,000, plus interest, in student loans. They are looking for steady work! Help this population make the connection with what you do and what types of employees you hire. Create a presence at job fairs and on-campus recruiting events. Streamline your involvement in these by building relationships with local institutions—or identify specific colleges around the country that offer the distribution or engineering programs that best prepare your future workforce, and concentrate on those. Send your recruiters out to talk to instructors and students about opportunities you have (even when you do not have them). When recruiting on campus, send in your Millennial employees. This generation is strongly peer influenced, and will respond to seeing your recruiters or other employees in their own age group.

Get creative in approaching college students—try some guerilla marketing tactics to get their attention, such as sending out exclusive invites to a meet-and-greet party via invitations on hand-delivered pizza boxes. Or, engage their problem-solving skills with

Millennials: Recruiting Messages That Matter

Want to attract Millennials? Align your messaging in job postings, online communications, interviews, and recruitment conversations with their strongest work values. Below are thoughts on “Millennial high points” and how to hit them:

- **Love of learning:** Explain your organization’s specific training and management-development opportunities. Education opportunities that appeal to Millennials might include peer-to-peer learning, apprenticeships, mentoring, technical skills, self-management, industry knowledge, innovation strategies, and leadership skills. Millennials want and expect to move up the corporate ladder quickly or be respected for their efforts.
- **Up for a challenge:** Convey that a job will challenge them, stretch their abilities continuously, and offer on-the-job learning. Construction and engineering companies can always make good use of bright, hard-working talent. This generation also has the advantage of being able to help companies embrace technology and update their processes to become more efficient.
- **Opportunity to make a difference:** Specify how the open position matters. Millennials are not content to feel like a cog in the machine—they want their work to make a difference. The insulation industry’s environmentally friendly benefits will appeal to them, along with the concrete nature of literally seeing their hard work create new or improve old systems and buildings.
- **Growth and development:** See love of learning and up for a challenge above. Use phrases like “growth opportunity” and mention benefits like tuition reimbursement or professional education opportunities. Anything that indicates skill building and a path to the future will appeal. Both the construction and the insulation industries offer a very solid, healthy paycheck and career path.
- **Lots of flexibility:** Did I mention flexibility? Millennials value flexible work schedules, flexible processes, flexible teams, etc. Anywhere you can build in flexibility, tout it in your recruiting messages.
- **Team-oriented:** Millennials work well in groups and prefer group work to individual endeavors. Mention whether and how teamwork is involved in the position, and talk about the team they will be part of.
- **Friendly corporate culture:** As mentioned in “WHY Do Excellent Candidates Want to Work for You?” Millennials put a great deal of weight on a positive work culture. Similarly, an organization with strong values will appeal to Millennials.

a campus-wide scavenger hunt that leads to a meet-and-greet party.

Start thinking long-term: consider identifying promising students in their freshman and sophomore years of college, and provide them with summer jobs until they graduate. You can start even earlier in Millennials' "careers" by forming partnerships with select high schools, technical schools, and community colleges. Encourage your employees to teach and guest lecture at colleges, community colleges, and technical and trade schools to get known and get to know the students. Partner with universities to build a curriculum for students that includes an internship or a co-op. The co-op arrangement might be for 40 to 50 hours per week over 6 months, allowing students to earn pay as they learn next to professionals.

Looking beyond college graduates, consider adding apprenticeships to your recruitment strategy; this would allow you to try out new hires as you train them. Partner with regional, state, and local collaborations to attract workers through apprenticeships and internships. Apprenticeships can be more cost-effective than hiring skilled staff and can improve productivity. Young apprentices who have made the choice to learn on the job will be loyal to your organization if and when they are hired permanently.

WHEN Are You Recruiting?

There is a definite cycle to recruiting new graduates of high school or higher education: start in the spring and if possible, offer summer internships or jobs. This can be your strongest relationship builder—Millennials are more likely to take a permanent job at an organization they already know.

Otherwise, your new recruiting efforts will be a year-round affair. Consider remaining steady or even increasing efforts over the holiday season and throughout the summer months. This could give you a competitive advantage at reaching job seekers as other organizations are slacking off.

WHY Do Excellent Candidates Want to Work for You?

Successful recruiting targets the message to address the values of your desired candidates. In the case

of Millennial job seekers, this means conveying certain things.

“This job is fast-paced and interesting.”

One young contractor told me, “If Millennials knew about this industry, we would be beating down your doors to get in. It’s fast-paced, it’s exciting, and every day is different.” So use your online (and offline) presence to explain this! When you cannot describe your industry—say, within the confines of a job posting—you can use phrases like “fast-paced,” “variety of work,” and “never dull” to convey this valued element. (Of course, you should only use descriptions like this if they are true—or your chosen candidate might not stick around for long.)

“You’ll love our culture.” Our research shows that a whopping 88% of potential Millennial hires consider positive work culture important or essential, and a strong culture is a more appealing differentiator to them than the size of an organization. So be sure your recruitment messaging highlights specifics of your company culture. Not sure what makes your culture unique? Go to the source and ask your employees! Send out an anonymous survey with questions like:

- What do you like about our company culture?
- Are we team oriented or individually focused? (Both are appealing to various individuals and you can highlight the benefits of either response.)
- Are we cooperative or competitive?
- Do we do business in an honest and ethical fashion?
- Does our environment offer flexibility?
- Do we live our values?
- How do you think the company views employees?
- Do you feel you have opportunities to grow?
- What are 3 words that describe our company?
- What do you like about your position?

Tally the responses and communicate the compelling reasons an employee would want to work for you—along with the knowledge, skills, abilities, education, experience, personality, and culture fit you are looking for.

“We strongly encourage work-life balance.” This goes back to the issue of flexibility but it bears repeating here, just as it bears repeating in your recruiting message. Every generation—and indeed, every employee—wants work-life balance; and everyone will have different needs to achieve it. If your company can commit to offering general flexibility in terms of schedule or other areas, Millennials will move you to their Employer A list.

These are the big 3 attractors for Millennials. For other reasons that younger candidates will want to work for you, see “Millennials: Recruiting Messages That Matter” on page 29.

Word of Mouth

After you have radicalized your recruiting with these fundamentals, it is time to ask yourself, “What am I missing?” The answer is probably right in front of you. You can leverage your current employees to attract more. Generally, referrals account for at least half of new hires for companies. Your employees are your best recruiters—and, those who are Millennials are likely to bring in more of their peers. In other words, as you begin to succeed at hiring top Millennial talent, it will get easier. Try it and see for yourself. ☺

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Traditional vs. Radicalized Recruiting

Why do you need to radicalize your recruiting? Because new and future professionals have radically different attitudes toward and expectations of work. Following is a sample of the difference.

Seasoned Professionals

- “My life is defined by my work.”
- Work and loyalty, expect to put in long hours.
- Tend to stay with companies.
- Work ethic is defined by hours spent at work.
- “Don’t rock the boat.”
- At the mercy of their employer.
- All generations need or expect work-life balance.

New Professionals

- “Making work my #1 priority does not pay off.”
- Work is to be enjoyed, not endured.
- Not afraid to change companies.
- Work ethic is defined by effective output rather than long hours.
- Critical of rules/procedures.
- “Not willing to sacrifice my personal time now for a job.”
- All generations need or expect work-life balance.

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