Effective hiring is one of the most difficult and most confounding aspects of running a drywall company. This is largely the result of decreasing numbers of young people entering the construction industry in addition to increasing retirements. Not to mention the increasingly transient and less responsible labor pool that served as a training ground for some great estimators and project managers at work today.

As the economy picks up and companies become busier, it will only get worse. But it is still possible to find and attract some good talent. It just takes a little more work, and you may have to examine some of the methods you’re accustomed to using.

In its most simplified form, hiring consists of three parts: Finding someone who brings to the table what you need, selling him or her on the opportunity you offer, and closing the deal. Each of these is loaded with things that can go wrong and have accounted for numerous incidents of hiring the wrong person as well as missing the opportunity to hire the right person for the job. On the other hand, understanding these three elements and using that understanding to your advantage can save lots of time and money. It can put you ahead of your competition and

By Jeff Chestine
ensure that you have a qualified person show up who feels good about having made the move.

**Finding the Right Person**

Finding the right person for the job is arguably the most important and often most difficult part of the whole process. Look around your office today. You can probably guess who reads the classified on a regular basis and who doesn’t. The top people in any company have other things on their minds and are generally too busy for that. Very few positions, especially management level positions are filled through newspaper or Internet advertising. But don’t give up hope. There are more effective ways to gain access to the talent you need.

The good people who work for you now know others like themselves at their previous companies. Ask them. Your vendors also know people at other companies. But be careful here as some of these folks can be pretty gossipy at times, and they typically will only tell you about people who “are looking.” A more
proactive and more effective approach is to enlist the help of a headhunter who specializes your industry and will commit to an exhaustive search on your behalf. Before you put a headhunter to work on a search, check out the individual and the firm. Ask for a full description of their process and a client reference or two. Don’t waste your time with someone who can’t give you both.

Sell the Opportunity

Once you have identified a good prospect or two, you have to put a little effort into selling the opportunity. This usually starts during the first interview and, in my experience, is the most poorly handled and frequently overlooked element of the entire process. That’s a shame, too, because selling the opportunity consists mostly of asking questions about the career interests of the candidate and showing how your company can fulfill those interests.

Of course you are going to thoroughly test and reference-check someone before you hire. But the truth is that if a candidate doesn’t leave a first interview with more interest than he had when he walked in, you may have wasted your time. I’ve seen the whole process die right there.

A good prospect is probably not desperate for a job. The good ones almost never are. In this market, a sharp estimator with a track record of success has countless options. Sometimes an employer will tell me, “I don’t want to do any selling. Either they want the job or they don’t.” That’s fine if you’re happy taking a chance on somebody who got fired from the last job or quit because of not being able to get along with others in the workplace. We have all seen examples of poor work ethics. Besides, while you sell the opportunity you gain valuable insight into how the prospect thinks and whether or not you want to hire. It’s a two-way street. You have on your “selling hat” and your “buying hat.”

During the course of this process it is also critical to check out the candidate’s work. If you’re trying to hire an estimator, then a take-off test is critical. Use a small section of an old job and go through the takeoff together. You’ll gain a lot of knowledge about the estimator’s thought process.

If you’re looking for a project manager, then ask questions about specific jobs. Ask for examples of jobs that were turned from losers into winners. Ask about jobs that made profits substantially above the expected, and ask how that was accomplished. Let him brag a little, then ask him to speak candidly about a problem job or a loser. An experienced and competent PM should be able to answer those questions with some detail.

All this questioning and selling says to any prospect that you are serious about putting together a competent and successful team, and you intend to make it an attractive opportunity for the right
Typically, two or three interviews are appropriate. More than that, and you probably miss out on some good opportunities.

**Closing the Deal**

Closing the deal is the final component of making a good hire. Handled properly, this step can ensure that your newest addition starts off with a smiley face and a fire in the belly. Handled improperly, you help someone get a nice big raise somewhere else or have him start with you feeling like he didn’t get what he should have.

If you have the indication that a candidate is motivated only by money, then tendering an official offer is probably a waste of time. There are ways of finding out about that beforehand. But if you believe the candidate brings to the table what you need and you have agreed on what can be expected from you and your company, then you should expect to pay 5 percent to 20 percent more than the candidate’s current income. There are lots of exceptions to that rule of thumb. This isn’t rocket science.

Again, successful hiring has become more difficult and will get worse before it gets better. This is due to demographics as much as it is to the fact that today’s fresh graduates have lots of options that appear more glamorous than the drywall subcontracting industry. But as long as you know what you want and you make the effort to find someone with those skills and qualifications who is willing to make a move for the right reasons, and you’re willing to do what it takes to attract that talent, you can still hire some good people.

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**About the Author**

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