



BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at bwilson@wilson-oyler.com.

5 ways to build bench strength

Early December headline in the *Wall Street Journal*: “Employers Gain Confidence to Hire.” The national unemployment rate has dropped below 7 percent. For many, this is really good news and an indication the economy is finally coming back.

This news is on top of reports that the economy grew at 4.1 percent and 3.2 percent rates in the third and fourth quarters of 2013 (in terms of real GDP).

The Green Industry, like all industries, benefits from positive economic news. However, unlike many others, our business depends on adequate labor. These headlines, then, indicate trouble ahead for Green Industry companies to have sufficient labor for future opportunities.

And it's not just production labor we need. It's middle managers, administrators and salespeople.

You don't have to be a victim of employment trends. There are some best practices that have proven to help proactive companies. And the most important of those is building bench strength.

Five steps to a bench-driven hiring culture include:

▶ **Let your employees drive recruiting.** I've always believed in using employees to help recruit. If recruiting and hiring is done by the human resources person or department, employees become passive in helping to find good people. It becomes, “Not my problem. It's HR's problem.” Sound familiar?

The best recruiters are engaged, energized and happy employees at all levels. If you have good people with good values and good work ethics, they

probably have friends with the same attributes working elsewhere. Encourage them to bring their friends into the company.

▶ **Stay in hiring mode.** When good people become available, hire them. Find a place for them in your organization so you have them when needed. You can always eliminate a weak player to keep your costs in line. If you wait until you need someone before you hire, you risk settling for what's available versus what's optimal. If you settle over and over again, the result is a mediocre, turnover-prone culture.

▶ **Build with a culture of promoting from within.** Establishing a career path encourages employees to stay. If they see opportunities and know they'll be considered, they'll be motivated to perform and achieve. Promote this concept heavily throughout your organization. You cannot talk about it enough.

▶ **Create a profile of the ideal high-potential, success-driven entry-level employee.** What attributes will make him or her successful in your company culture? Create a document identifying these items and use it as a guideline for hiring. This process will help you be a little more selective and efficient. Invest quality time to get quality people.

▶ **Develop a “train your replacement” culture.** Every crew leader, for example, should be identifying whom among their crewmembers could replace them if they get promoted. Each manager should identify which people on his team are promotable and help them do what they need to do to be ready. If you don't have promotable people, you need to address that in your hiring processes. Profile and establish success and performance metrics at all levels.

Integrating these five steps will build a dynamic company culture populated with talented people who are committed to your business and want to get ahead, people who drive opportunity because they themselves want opportunity.

Watching your people grow is not only a beautiful thing, but the positive energy in your bottom line is contagious.

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