

by MEP Jobs

When it comes to hiring new talent, many HVAC business owners value experience over all other qualifications on a prospective employee's resume. Not only does employing a veteran of the industry improve the quality of the company's craftsmanship and reputation, it requires less investment in training.

However, senior-level prospects bring a bit of baggage to the interview process, as they are often accustomed to the hefty benefits package of yesterday. And for a lot of employers, offering these kinds of packages is no longer a possibility.

But there's good news for employers who find themselves torn between the affordable worker and the practiced employee. As it turns out, many HVAC-industry job seekers are coming to understand the effects of rising healthcare costs. The result is that they are placing more emphasis on qualitative benefits, such as enjoyment of their work, than on the more traditional, financial benefits.

From the Horse's Mouth

Earlier this spring, MEP Jobs, the online job website for HVAC professionals, polled its users, asking them to identify the best incentives an employer could offer them. Surprisingly, survey respondents chose "Interesting Work" as often as "Full Health Benefits."

Together, the two factors accounted for 41 percent of the votes (20 percent for health benefits; 21 percent for interesting work), surpassing "A Fat Paycheck" by five percentage points.

Although "A Fat Paycheck" ranked highest in responses, the survey results clearly indicate that employees are placing more emphasis on enjoyment of their work than in previous years.

While the survey responders were anonymous, they are most likely senior workers. That's because most MEP Jobs users are experienced. More than 80 percent have worked in their field for more than 10 years; nearly 40 percent have more than 15 years in the industry.

Conduct Your Own Employee Survey

There are several ways HVAC employers can leverage this shift in priorities among job seekers, especially veteran prospects.

First, every effort should be made to provide employees with access to stimulating projects. Because each employee may have a different idea of what makes a job exciting, business owners should create a culture that encourages team members to share their ideas.

Opening up the lines of communications with employees is key to providing team members with a rewarding career. Employers often guess at what employees are looking for because it's easier than engaging them in a brainstorming process. Not only does surveying employees take more time, it may also, employers fear, reveal more than they want to know.

Continued...

In addition to asking employees for their ideal project recommendations, employers should get their teams' opinions on tools and processes. After all, it is often the employees who are most tapped in to the latest materials and gear, methods and practices. Providing them with such contemporary tools of the trade will not only improve the work product, but the employees' pride in the results of their labor.

Gratitude is Contagious

Beyond access to modern tools and stimulating projects, business owners should consider the value of communicating client gratitude to the entire team. When a customer is pleased, he typically thanks only the person with whom he's had contact from the start, and this may not be the employee who completed the physical labor on the job. Sharing the customer's kind words with the entire crew can go a long way in the fight to keep a senior employee satisfied with his job.

Happiness on the job often has a lot to do with happiness off the job. We hear a lot about work-life balance, and employers need to pay attention to American workers' call for more flexibility in their schedules. Consider offering flex hours or surprise employees who have worked overtime (even if they are being paid for those extra hours) with an afternoon off.

Getting Creative with Incentives

Another alternative to a hefty benefits package is employee-recognition incentives. Personalized, non-cash awards, such as gift certificates, trips, golf clubs or home electronics, have a great impact in the mind of the employee.

Incentive programs can also be designed to achieve greater results for the company as a whole. All employees should have an opportunity to participate, as each person plays an integral role in contributing to the success of a company.

Loyal employees who are recognized for their contributions feel valued by their employer, which builds a stable foundation for a company's success.

Show Me the Money!

While our research indicates an increase in the emphasis employees place on qualitative benefits, workers still need to feel adequately compensated. Although employers may not be able to offer the health benefits they once could, they can compensate in other fiscal areas.

Take retirement benefits for example. Particularly appealing to the senior-level prospects HVAC employers want on their teams, a vigorous retirement package can be a satisfactory supplement for less-than-stellar health plans.

According to the eighth annual Transamerica Retirement Survey reported on in February, 62 percent



Alternative Solutions For New Hires

Continued...

of employees surveyed said they would leave their job for a similar position with an employer that offered a retirement plan.

Instead of dwelling on what we can't offer and getting creative about what we can, we improve our chances for attracting a happy and productive work force. Satisfied employees are a company's best asset when it comes to recruiting the kinds of employees who make for a successful business.

Jeff Dickey-Chasins is Vice President of Marketing for MEP Jobs, the leading job website serving the HVAC, electrical, plumbing and general construction industries.