

RECRUITING RESOLUTIONS FOR THE NEW YEAR

Make proactive recruiting part of your company's strategic plan for 2008.

BY TIM R. JOHNSON

WITH THE FIRST OF every year come resolutions. Sadly, most of them are forgotten within a few weeks. We are all guilty of this to some extent. Resolve for healthy eating is cast aside at a fast-food drive-through. Plans to stay organized are lost in a clutter of to-dos. But when you stick to your resolutions, the rewards can be great.

The same holds true at the office. A successful year for your business is often tied to carrying out the resolutions set forth in your strategic plan. But taking a proactive approach to hiring needs is one critical resolution that is often forgotten. Don't let proactive staffing go the way of a new and unused fitness club membership; and don't watch excess turnover and unfilled strategic positions weigh your firm down. Make a resolution to better your business and align recruiting with your strategic plan for the New Year!

Turnover Happens

Turnover is virtually inevitable and is very common at the start of the year. Year-end bonuses have been dispersed. People resolve to evaluate their careers. Competing firms follow up on common year-end recruiting efforts to attract new talent for the New Year.

Estimating an approximate annual employee turnover rate of 20%—standard for the building design and construction industry—means a 20-person firm stands to lose four employees per year, while a 200-person firm stands to lose 40. Without careful attention to staffing and recruiting needs, turnover can leave several empty desks in a company. And these voids can be costly. For example, a mid-level, billable desk costing your firm \$75,000 annually, when empty could cause upwards of \$225,000 in lost billings for the year—nearly \$20,000 per month. But these industry-standard numbers, like the reading on your bathroom scale, can be kept under control. And proper execution of the right employee retention and recruiting strategies can help.

For starters, make a resolution to incorporate employee feedback—collected through year-end or new-year employee surveys, perhaps—into your firm's strategic plan. This provides a process by which to address employee concerns, and it can help control turnover.

When turnover does occur, and it always does, do what you can to benefit from the loss. Conduct exit interviews with those employees who decide to leave. These interviews should be done by someone other than the hiring manager. During any exit interview, go beyond compensation. Ask for thoughts on how to better the firm. Learn what the individual's concerns are. Request opinions on how to enhance career development at the firm. Be sure to keep track of all this data. Use it not only to shape your firm's strategic plan, but also to position yourself to best market your firm to potential employees.

As the New Year is indeed a time when individuals are exploring and seeking out new career opportunities, your firm can absolutely seize the opportunity by seeking *them* out. Keep in mind that top-talent candidates will not be found on job boards. Many of them will be interested in new career options, but they will not be searching the help wanted sections. Find them before they find your competitors—or before your competitors find them first. Open a dialogue with those candidates who can benefit your firm in the New Year, and show them how they would fit into your plans for growth and success. This will preemptively address the weighty costs of empty desks, not to mention ensure quality control and quality assurance through sufficiently staffed talent teams. By incorporating recruiting into your strategic plan, preemptively planning for turnover, and appropriately budgeting in advance for recruiting efforts throughout the year, your firm will be a cut above competitors who rely on a reactive—and more costly—approach.

The Search is On

So how do you bring proactive hiring into your company's strategic plan? First, identify strategic hires your firm plans to make throughout the year. Involve top management when outlining this plan, which should include budgeted hire dates. Assign resources to identify candidates for these strategic hires—networking, internal recruiters, and headhunters, for example.

Next comes budgeting. By incorporating hiring expenditures into your firm's business plan, you avoid being hit with sudden, unexpected costs. You also avoid hitting the panic button when a vacancy opens up at an inopportune time. Consider that one desk empty for three months equates approximately to the cost to identify, recruit, and hire for two positions of the same level—with typical target close dates set at about three months. In addition, make a resolution to create monthly allowances toward recruiting, and stick to it. As a result, your firm will be prepared to deal with the expenses incurred by turnover and will significantly limit costs.

Start Today

With a carefully crafted strategic plan, your firm can ensure success throughout the year. In order to strategize properly and successfully meet goals, a firm must, simply put, have all its bases covered. At the core of a successful team are the right team members. For a firm to ensure sufficient staffing with the best employees, both in terms of new strategic hires and in response to turnover, planning for proactive recruiting is a must-do. Like any resolution, it's a matter of making it—and keeping it. **MSC**

Tim Johnson is project operations manager of the Engineering Division at SullivanKriess, Inc. He can be reached directly at tjohnson@sullivankriess.com.