5 Quick Questions: Attracting & Retaining Quality Manufacturing Workers

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Interview with Brian Binke, President & CEO, The Birmingham Group

According to one global recruitment specialist, the best in the labor pool are looking for more than just money.

It’s no secret that one of the most pressing issues facing U.S. manufacturing is a lack of qualified workers. In looking to fill this skills gap, Brian Binke, the President & CEO of The Birmingham Group, an affiliate of MRINetwork and one of the world’s largest recruitment organizations, feels that organizations need to focus on several internal facets in attracting the best and most qualified people.

He recently sat down to discuss some advice for manufacturers about finding and keeping the best the labor pool has to offer.

Q: One of the biggest issues manufacturers face right now is finding qualified workers. What are your thoughts on this?

A: Companies need to develop a corporate brand, image and message that attracts top candidates. As they're building the brand, everyone in the hiring process should be on the same page about how the opportunity is presented to potential candidates.

Many skills can be taught, however IQ is not one of them. So, it’s important for companies to hire bright and talented people, finding a place for them in the organization, even if the candidates might be a little off the requirements of the position.

Q: What can manufacturers do to help retain their best workers?

A: People don't typically leave a job just because of money. The biggest reasons for leaving are lack of career growth and feeling mistreated by managers. Companies should have a built-in career track for each position that provides a clear blueprint for advancement, assuming the employee meets clearly-defined, measurable goals. Mentoring is also key in helping employees build their management skills, positioning them to be the future leaders of the company.

It is also important for companies to continually think of ways to improve their work environment and culture. Building a work hard, play hard culture is effective, because ideally employees should feel if they leave the company, they're not just leaving a job, they're leaving a family.

Q: What can manufacturers do to help ensure the workforce of tomorrow has an interest in manufacturing jobs?

A: Much of it has to do with employer branding and educating the public via multiple marketing channels about the type of work that manufacturers do. Essentially, the industry has to demonstrate why manufacturing is vital to our economy and show interesting career paths that will attract exceptional talent. Manufacturers also need to impact people at a young age when they are most impressionable. This can be accomplished by getting involved in youth organizations and K-12 events.

Q: What is the most under-appreciated skill that employers may overlook in evaluating a current employee or in assessing a potential one?

A: The skill that is most overlooked is the ability to think outside of the box. Employers in today’s job market are really focused on finding specialists in particular areas and filling specific job requirements. They want candidates who are extremely skilled, experienced and who require very little training to complete the tasks at hand.

The problem with focusing so much on candidates and employees being an “exact match” to the job requirements or “doing things the way the company has always done them” is that innovation and talent can be squelched in the process. Bright, talented, outside of the box thinkers are what businesses need to remain competitive and cutting edge. Skills and experience are important, but companies need to be more willing to consider candidates who are extremely bright and innovative, but may need some minor training to meet the job requirements.

Additionally, employees want to feel their ideas and contributions are valued by their employers. When employers create an environment of always “doing things the way they’ve always been done”, they devalue the innovation and talent that their employees bring to the table, making themselves vulnerable to losing top performers.

Q: If you could give U.S. manufacturers one thing, what would it be?

A: Talent wins. Don't just try to fill spots. Go after the best and brightest people, and find a way to bring them in your into your organization.

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