



HR



Seven Smart Recruiting Tips for Green Industry Businesses

Introduction: Recruit, Recruit, Recruit

It's hard to be successful if you don't have the right team.

In today's market, irrigation and landscape contractors are struggling to find responsible, capable and motivated employees.

- Many experienced employees left the industry during the construction downturn
- The first wave of baby boomer retirements is resulting in experienced technicians and managers leaving when they're needed most
- Contracting firms without a recruiting or talent-development plan are poaching talent from their competitors, driving up industry pay rates
- Companies adjusting to increasing demand have been caught without a plan for attracting and on-boarding new candidates

This guide, developed especially for green industry contractors, is intended to provide you with tips and tools to improve your in-house recruiting capabilities.



Tip #1: Recruiting Must Be Continual

Less than 15 years ago, finding great candidates for landscape positions required just putting an ad in the local newspaper and then interviewing the stream of applicants who came through the door. Now like the fast food outlet with the perpetual “help wanted” sign, professional contractors must embrace recruiting as an ongoing year-round activity. Your strategy will include:

- “soft tactics” like signage on your trucks, a page on your website and participation in vocational programs, whether you’re looking to fill a position or not

supplemented with:

- “hard tactics” like specific job ads when you’re looking to make a targeted hire

Successful contractors find that continually looking for candidates is the best recipe for attracting top talent.



Tip #2: Poach at Your Own Risk

At first glance, stealing a valued employee from a competitor seems like the ideal solution when you have an open position. It's fast, it seems easy and it drives results, right? Maybe not.

The positives of hiring a competitor's employee:

- Work experience. You get someone who can contribute immediately.
- Fewer surprises. The employee knows the general job duties, so there's less chance for a mismatch of expectations and motivation.

The negatives of hiring a competitor's employee:

- Higher cost. You typically have to offer a raise or greater work flexibility (less flexible hours, overtime, etc.) to lure an experienced worker.
- “Pay me more or I will leave”. There's a good chance once an employee is mobile, he'll fall for the same thing again.
- Baggage and bad habits. Often the competitor's employee most willing to leave is the one under the most pressure for poor work habits or bad behavior.



Tip #3: Recruiting Tactics Vary Depending on the Job Function

You'll need to use different recruiting tools and resources when searching for field managers versus field laborers. Or when searching for office personnel versus service technicians.

Looking for field laborers?

- Use a referral program to attract candidates from your employees.
- See Tip #5 on recruiting Hispanic employees.
- Hire from high school sports teams. Post flyers in local gyms and rec centers.
- Use simple online recruiting sites like Craigslist.
- Conventional signs and flyers work.

Hiring a field foreman or service technician?

- Contact local vocational programs.
- Interface with national and local trade associations. Use job board.
- Consider hiring US military veterans.
- Use websites like Monster, Career Builder, SimplyHired, Indeed and Zip Recruiter.
- Promote from within by using education and training to develop leaders.



Tip #4: Pay Referral Bonuses

Establish an ongoing program to pay referral bonuses for current employees who refer a new team member. In order for a program to be successful, you can't just ask once and then forget about it.

- Give your referral program a name.
- Reinforce its importance at every team meeting
- Pay bonuses when the new hire stays for at least 90 days



Tip #5: Pay Special Attention to Marketing to Hispanic Workers

Many of the green industry's hardest working and most loyal employees are Hispanics. Tuning your recruiting tactics to this special audience can deliver big rewards in productive, happy candidates.

- Ask your current employees to post flyers in apartment buildings, markets and laundromats in Hispanic neighborhoods.
- Talk with a priest at a local church about potential candidates. Place announcements in church bulletins.
- Explore Spanish-language radio or newspaper ads.
- Participate in Latino carnivals and fairs.
- Hold a “career days” open house.



Tip #6: Embrace the Unconventional

One of the new rules of today's workplace is that the old rules don't apply.

As your searching for talent, look outside the traditional "box" of 7AM to 4:30PM candidates and consider:

- Older or retired candidates to provide "shop" services like cleaning and stocking trucks, replenishing inventory, etc. after hours. This gets your team in clean, ready vehicles each morning.
- Hiring women, minorities and veterans.
- Using subcontractors and/or outsourcing functions. The hourly rates can be higher, but the overhead and risk can be minimized.
- Candidates who have demonstrated motivation and success in another profession who are seeking a career change or part-time work.



Tip #7: Treat Applicants Like Customers

First impressions matter. Give candidates a warm welcome to your company during the interview process.

- Have a website that shares your company philosophy and story. Candidates will look at it before coming in for the interview.
- Have a pleasant waiting area for candidates that's appropriately climate controlled.
- Be sure the interview process is smooth and comfortable. Tough questions are okay, but be polite and friendly to the candidate.
- Be prepared to make a decision quickly. Don't drag things out with a candidate or keep them wondering. You don't want a reputation of being an interview mill.
- Give candidates time for a transition from their prior position.

