

Solutions for a Changing Workforce



There is no doubt that today's workforce is in the midst of change. Older workers are retiring. Younger workers bring in new attitudes—and new expectations. Past ways of thinking about manufacturing—as dirty and dead-end jobs—are giving way to a better understanding of today's realities.

Sign, graphics and visual communications are changing the way they recruit and train, as well. Two ISA member companies share their tips for responding to workforce needs.

Adjusting to a Changing Workforce

There is no doubt that, when it comes to recruiting today's employees, yesterday's methods no longer work.

At Ruggles Sign in Versailles, Ky., the approach has changed, according to Brad Turpin Jr., the company's organizational development manager.

"We've adjusted how we ask questions during interviews," Turpin said.

One innovative approach: When considering two candidates for a project manager position, both were interviewed at the same time.

"We asked questions and provided different scenarios," Turpin said. "We got them flustered pretty easily to see how they would react. You get to see these two totally opposite personalities."

The company ended up hiring both because "we just didn't want to lose either one of them."

It was part of a lengthy process that took six to eight weeks, "so we had time to think about how we were going to do it."

The changing interview process includes personality profiles for each new hire to ensure that they will fit within Ruggles Sign's culture.

Finding the right employee—one who will end up staying on the job for a good while—is required today. So is finding different recruiting methods. It means things like participating in Sign Manufacturing Day as well as building relationships with area technical schools. Ruggles Sign may eventually establish a co-op program, if all the liability issues can be worked out.

No matter where the employees come from, though, training is expected, Turpin said. "The sign industry is so custom that we have a lot of success hiring the right person and then training them to do things the way we want them to. It's hard to find someone experienced in soldering skills, for instance. One of our main struggles is to find CDL drivers that also want to work on signs and can drive our big trucks."

Those who already have a commercial driver's license are highly sought out and pay can be an issue. So Ruggles Sign is more likely to find those who have some CDL training and then help them finish certification. "We're investing in our employees for that specific need," Turpin said.

One other aspect of the changing workforce is training employees in "soft skills," such as communication and personal work habits. "I don't understand why they're not getting it in school or technical training, but it's a different kind of workforce and they have to be handled differently. Different things motivate them and we have to be willing to train."

The Power of Referrals

When Steel Art Co. moved its offices to Norwood, Mass., inviting the public in proved a great way to introduce itself to the new community. It also served as a way to let potential employees know about the work that it does.

Participating in Sign Manufacturing Day has extended well past serving as a welcome mat.

"We thought it was a good experience for our own employees," said Gerry Racine, Steel Art's vice president of human resources. "They took pride in being able to show off their work areas a little bit."

Beyond that morale boost, though, the day laid the groundwork in building a relationship with the local schools. While Steel Art hasn't yet made a direct hire, it has led to long-term relationships. Racine was asked to serve on an advisory board for a local high school and has done onsite recruiting at area schools.

The company has its best successes in hiring new workers through employee referrals, Racine said. "When people are happy at work,

STATS • FACTS

About 22 percent of skilled manufacturing workers will retire over the next decade, according to research from the Manufacturing Institute and Deloitte.



5 ISA RESOURCES

to Find and Develop Workers

Finding the next generation of sign, graphics and visual communications workers requires a multi-pronged approach:

- Sign Manufacturing Day, held the first Friday in October, brings in high school, community college and technical school students to learn more about the industry. Learn more at www.signs.org/mfgday.
- The ISA Job Board connects those looking for work with those hiring. Find it at www.signs.org/careers.
- Recruit newcomers to the industry using ISA-developed videos and infographics, housed at www.signs.org/careers.

Training existing employees, whether through a formal onboarding process or as part of an individual development plan, is also needed:

- The ISA Sign Academy includes over 50 online courses to help employees learn the latest techniques in design, fabrication, installation, project management and sales/marketing. Find a listing of courses at www.signs.org/online.
- A Sign Installer's Guide online learning system provides an overview of safety and techniques for installers. It is designed to include testing to ensure learning. Learn more at www.signs.org/online.

To further explore ISA's programs to help companies develop workers, email workforce@signs.org.

they're more inclined to want to share. We give top priority to referrals. I don't use agencies. I don't need to spend unnecessary money to acquire the right people. With the schools and associations that we're familiar with, as well as referrals, recruiting is proactive and successful."

Once inside, the company puts new employees through a three-week onboarding process. Each new hire is assigned a trainer and both employee and trainer complete daily logs that they forward to Human Resources at the end of each day.

"I'll open my office door the next morning and find training sheets left under my door. I immediately look through them to see how things are going; I am always curious to read what both the trainer and the person in training

report, as they are done separately. If there are immediate issues, we'll address them. At the end, we sit down, look at the training sheets all together and map out what the new hire's career might look like. It is a great opportunity to be clear about career planning. After those three weeks, we have a person we believe is well engrossed in the projects they are handling."

The success of the onboarding runs deep into Steel Art's culture, Racine said. "Our team leaders, management team and senior people are engaged in continuous improvement. It's not questioning who made the mistake, but in making sure we learn from it and don't repeat it. It's hiring the right people from the beginning and really reinforcing the training process with good solid communications." |

ISA Digital Badge Honorees

Today's workers want training to help them grow in their careers. ISA developed the ISA Digital Badge, which companies can use to optimize hiring and employee retention. It's a powerful investment in an employee's career, and can help determine when an employee is ready for a promotion or other responsibilities.

A number of employees recently have earned digital badges in one of 15 areas valuable in today's sign, graphics and visual communications industry.

Amber Alvarez	Poyant Signs
Myles Amor	Amor Sign Studios, Inc.
Matt Baker	Bakers' Signs & Manufacturing
Emily Bamonte	Holthaus Lackner Signs
Daniela Echeverry	Imagen Digital
Michael Garavaglia	Ideation Signs & Communications, Inc.
Taren Heindl	Icon Identity Solutions
Mary Hester	Carolina Pride Carwash Systems
Bethany Leonard	Poyant Signs
Glenda Martin	G6 Hospitality LLC
Justin Matheny	Prairie Signs, LLC
Starr Mershon	Universal Sign Company
Avery Oldach	Poyant Signs
Ryan Schurle	Schurle Signs Inc.
Nicholas Stauff	The Howard Company, Inc.
Judy Walton	Simon Property Group
Johnathan Warren	KeyedIn Solutions
Rachel Wolfgang	Poyant Signs

To learn more about the ISA Digital Badge, visit www.signs.org/digitalbadge.