

## Hilton Displays Finds Success with New Hires



When it comes to finding workers, the competition is stiff for Hilton Displays. The Greenville, S.C., area has a BMW plant, along with facilities for Michelin Tires and 3M.

“The Upstate is just exploding,” said Tracey Crews-Hammond, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, Hilton’s director of human resources. “It’s been challenging.”

A strong relationship with a staffing agency primarily for the manufacturing side of the business has been successful. “The recruiters there know enough about our business and the culture so that if somebody comes in who is a good fit, they send them here,” Crews-Hammond said.

Granted, it’s not every day that a person with transferrable skills happens to walk into the staffing agency. So Hilton has had to expand the ways in which it finds workers. It has been Crews-Hammond’s focus since she was hired in late 2016. Early on, she was getting to know workers when one asked her about her recruiting plans.

“There was a gentleman on the metal fabrication floor who said, ‘We need people desperately.’ I said, ‘Do you know anybody?’”

He connected her with his former welding instructor at Bonds Career Center, a program for high school students. She contacted the instructor and met several of his students. She interviewed three and gave them a welding test. All were hired, though one has since moved out of state.

When Hilton participated in its first ISA Sign Manufacturing Day—an event which brings students to tour sign, graphics and visual communications companies to hear about career opportunities—the two Bonds hires spoke to students about their careers. “That was extremely powerful,” Crews-Hammond said.

As a result of participating in ISA Sign Manufacturing Day in 2017, three students were hired, pegged to start immediately after their high school graduation from Bonds. Two were hired in metal fabrication and a third, in the letter fabrication area. Another student was hired in the paint department from another area high school.

The relationship with the career center has become a “partnership,” Crews-Hammond said. “That has been a nice feeder.” In addition to the new hires, Hilton has enjoyed summer interns, one in marketing and another in project management.

Currently, Hilton is closely aligned with Bonds, which is one of four career centers for local high school students. Crews-Hammond has brought counselors in from each of the centers to tour Hilton’s operation and understand more about the industry. She hopes the program continues to expand beyond metal fabricators and welding students from one school into other programs at other career centers.

“We’d like to grow out into assembly, autobody and paint,” she said. “I would love to have our first co-op person who would come in half a day. That’s probably our next step, but I don’t feel that we were in a position to do that just yet.”

Working with recent high school graduates has required a bit of a shift in onboarding, Crews-Hammond said. Some students come to Hilton without ever having held a job—

### STATS • FACTS

Between 2011 and 2030, 10,000 Baby Boomers turn 65 every day, according to Pew Research. In 2016, The Manufacturing Institute and

## TIPS TO START *a Relationship*

and need help developing soft skills like understanding the importance of attendance and work ethic.

“We coach our team lead and the members of that team to prepare them, so that they understand they’re not only going to be giving them tools to further their knowledge, but working on soft skills,” Crews-Hammond said. “That’s helping reaffirm what we’re trying to do. There are quite a few in that department who are of retirement age. This can be a feeder for them to carry on their legacy.”

That has been a boost to current employees, who have jumped on the training bandwagon willingly. “They take a lot of pride in what they do,” Crews-Hammond said. And they’re willing to share that knowledge—knowing that Crews-Hammond is there for support.

“We have had that happen when some of the new hires come in: the employee they are paired with may get overwhelmed or lose patience. They know they can come and ask for a break. We had that with one of our first high school hires. Several gentlemen were constantly telling him to put the phone away.”

When it looked like the recent graduate might never make the transition to good employee, “the most gruff person in that area said, ‘I’ll take him. But you better be prepared.’ They developed a relationship. Jim was tough on him and it was what he needed. Had someone not given him that last chance, he might not have made it here.”

Tracey Crews-Hammond, SPHR, SHRM-SCP, Hilton’s director of human resources, offers tips for building a relationship with a local school and creating successful new hires as a result.

- Don’t despise small beginnings. “I would much rather have one or two quality hires than to say we placed seven people who lasted for two weeks. I need for everyone to see the positives, one step at a time.”
- Realize there may be failures—and that’s OK. “This is not a one-time shot. You may have a one-hit wonder, or you could have a one-hit disaster. Don’t give up if you get it wrong. Take ownership of it.”
- Get buy-in from coworkers who may work alongside an extremely inexperienced new hire. “Coach them upfront. Help them anticipate the issues that may come up.”
- Take the long view. One of Hilton’s first hires left within the first year, wanting to move away from his hometown, but that doesn’t mean his relationship with the company is over. “The boys in the South always return to their mamas,” she laughed. “He may come back to town. When he does, where is he going to call? Hilton Displays will be at the top of his mind.”

The end result has been positive for existing employees. Crews-Hammond said that overall attendance is up. “I can’t tie it directly, but I can tell you that the buy-in is there. They understand that we’re trying to find people who want to be here and who value what they do. One of our workers who was close to retirement said, ‘This is my legacy. I’ve spent 25-plus years doing this job. I want my children to know that I had purpose. I want to be able to give this to someone else.’”

It’s that sort of attitude that helps Hilton compete with the many manufacturing jobs

in the area—some of which are for brands that everyone knows.

“I can’t compete salary-wise with Michelin and 3M,” Crews-Hammond said. “But I tell people, ‘You will get more of a sense of work/life balance. You’re a name, not a number.’”

It’s that philosophy that is paying off—not only for the new hires, but also for the existing employees who invest in them. | 

## ISA SIGN MANUFACTURING DAY 2018

ISA Sign Manufacturing Day 2018 provides a prime opportunity to connect with local schools. Last year, more than 3,700 students toured participating companies. Over the years, some companies have made hires as a result of the day and developed internships and co-op programs.

ISA Sign Manufacturing Day 2018 is scheduled for October 5, though companies can alter that date if it better fits local school schedules.

ISA provides a toolkit and other resources to help your company plan the perfect day—and the start of a great relationship with local schools. Learn more by contacting [workforce@signs.org](mailto:workforce@signs.org).

