

Building Your Best Team: Recommended Hiring Practices for the Construction Industry

By Heather N. Stone, Esq., Human Resources Risk Advisor

How much thought does your company put into its hiring practices? If your answer is “not much,” then your company could be at risk.

The hiring process is not unlike a construction project. Imagine how difficult it would be for your company to complete a construction project if it did not first meet with the property owner to determine the vision for the project, consult with an architect or engineer to lay out project plans, collaborate with others working on the project, prepare a budget, or determine your company’s suitability for the work. Even if your company was able to put together a structure without doing any of that pre-work, it would have no insight into whether it built an adequate structure or even the right one at all. In essence, the project would be a complete gamble.

The same is true for the hiring process. If your company wants to quickly fill an open position without first doing any pre-work, then it can simply hire the first person who is interested in taking the job. That gamble may pay off, or it could become a complete disaster for the company. Like construction, in order to avoid costly and unnecessary mistakes, successful hiring requires adequate, thoughtful preparation and planning. The same care and consideration that your company takes in building a structure should be used when putting together your team.

Vision: Review Core Values

Just as you would begin a construction project by meeting with the project owners to determine their vision, begin your hiring process by reflecting back on your company’s core values. Core values explain the company’s vision and character in a few simple words, such as: accountability, commitment, integrity, safety, diversity. For example, a company that holds “integrity” as a core value might represent to its clients that it will act honestly and commit to fairness and ethical and moral behavior in the marketplace.



When using core values as a hiring tool, the company can better gauge whether an applicant’s values, skills, and experience are consistent with the company’s vision. For example, if your company values integrity, how would it feel about hiring someone who claims that he will do “whatever it takes” to get a project completed under cost? While at first blush the “do whatever it takes” attitude sounds desirable, the company should carefully vet this candidate to make sure that his “do whatever it takes” attitude will not compromise

the company's reputation or its values. As a best practice, be sure that all hiring is done with the company's core values in mind.

Architectural Drawings: Prepare a Job Description

Some companies forego written job descriptions and only use referrals, word of mouth, or other similar means to communicate their hiring needs to potential candidates. This is not a recommended practice.

Your company should maintain a current, written job description for each position in the company. Why? Job descriptions are akin to architectural drawings or engineering plans. They provide a tremendous amount of guidance to the builder, and can keep the process on the right track. Job descriptions map out the essential functions of job, explain what tools are needed (i.e., the knowledge, skills and experience necessary for the position), identify any potential occupational hazards, and set forth the salary range and ben-

efits offered. The hiring manager can use this road map to determine if an applicant meets most or all of the specs laid out in the plan. Moreover, it is a valuable tool that your company can use to measure all potential candidates by the same objective criteria. Written job descriptions have secondary benefits to construction companies as well. In addition to providing clear guidance for the recruiting and hiring process, job descriptions can be used to manage performance expectations, determine whether modified work is available for an injured worker, and/or show that expectations are not being met when planning a discharge.

The Bid Process: Recruiting

With plans in place, the company will be able to speak intelligently to others about its hiring needs and begin accepting applications or "bids" from interested candidates. The company should look for candidates that are the best fit for the job, meaning that they have an adequate level of knowledge, skills, and experience to complete the work, and will agree to do the work for a certain price.



Begin by looking internally. Sometimes the best person for the job is already working for you. Therefore, consider providing your qualified top performers with an opportunity for advancement by allowing them to apply to higher level positions.

In addition, ask your existing employees for referrals. Getting a recommendation from your employees cuts down on recruiting costs, and your current employees are not likely to refer someone who is unqualified or expected to be a bad employee. When necessary, advertise your position through targeted channels, which may include getting referrals from colleagues in your industry, online recruiting, or advertising in trade publications.

All interested applicants, even those coming through an internal referral, should follow the same recruiting process. For instance, if your company normally requires external candidates to fill out an application or send in a resume, then internal candidates and personal referrals must do so as well. The purpose is to start all applicants on an objectively level playing field.

Next, the company should invite a select group of candidates for an interview. Whether that interview takes place over the phone or face-to-face, there should be more than one person from the company participating in the interview. The interviewers should be certain to ask each candidate the same core set of questions so that they can adequately compare candidates, and steer clear of any questions that could imply discriminatory or unfair hiring practices. For example, it would be inappropriate to ask, "Do you go to church?" or, "How many days did you call in sick last year?" These questions could suggest that the employer is not interested in hiring people of different religions (religious discrimination), or someone who has recently been ill (potential disability discrimination). Even a question as innocuous as "When did you graduate from high school," could get your company in trouble for age discrimination. The best practice is to limit questions to those directly related to the open position.

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Close out the recruiting process with a written offer letter. To some construction companies, this may seem overly formal or even unnecessary. But consider what it would be like to close out a bid without a formal written proposal. The intentions of the parties and terms under which they agreed to work together would not be clear and could easily be subject to abuse. The offer letter is essential because it explains the terms and conditions under which the employment is being offered, including the contingencies upon which the company can revoke its offer of employment.

Measure Twice, Cut Once: The Importance of Reference Checks

Workers often put their best face forward during the interview process. As a result, an employer can be easily won over by a charismatic applicant and think that it is a good idea to get the person started working right away. That is not a recommended practice.

As the old adage goes, “trust, but verify.” As a matter of course, all offers of employment should be contingent upon the applicant successfully passing a criminal background check, reference check, and pre-employment drug screening. A negative result on one of these tests could result in the company revoking its offer of employment.

A criminal background or public records check must be limited to the last seven years. Give careful consideration to any convictions that appear on the applicant’s record. Certain convictions may send up red flags for your company. For instance, drug convictions, fraud, deceit, assault and battery may suggest that the person you have selected may not have the moral character that you want in your workplace. If your company revokes its offer of employment based on a criminal record, you will need to provide a copy of that record to the applicant. Background checks are also recommended. This

is an opportunity for the company to discuss the applicant’s attributes with his/her personal or professional references. These discussions will hopefully confirm that your company has made a good hiring decision.

Finally, because many jobs in the construction industry are inherently hazardous, your company may want to consider a pre-employment physical to verify the candidate is physically able to do the work (either with or without accommodations),



and mandate a pre-employment drug screening test. Under the federal Drug Free Workplace Act, contractors must certify that they will provide drug-free workplaces as a condition of receiving a contract or grant from a federal agency. There are similar requirements for those contracting with the State of California. In general, it is important to screen out and revoke an offer of employment for anyone showing signs of illegal drug use.

Final Comment

The bottom line is that it takes time to find the right person. Just as your company takes the time to plan and prepare for its projects, so too must your company take time to plan and prepare for its hiring needs.■

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Lead Water Poisoning

Although lead-based paint and dust in older buildings are the most common sources of lead poisoning, drinking water is sometimes a source as well. This is mostly due to old, corroded pipes.

High levels of lead in the bloodstream can cause serious health effects, especially in children under the age of 6. Symptoms of lead poisoning in children include developmental delay, learning difficulties, irritability, weight loss, fatigue, abdominal pain, vomiting, constipation and hearing loss.

Since you can't see, smell or taste lead in water, the only way to detect it is to have the water tested. If your home is served by public water systems, your local water authority should be able to provide this information. You can also use an at-home lead-testing kit.

If your tap water's lead levels exceed 15 ppb, you can possibly reduce the threat of lead poisoning by doing the following:

- Run cold water for at least a minute before using or drinking it.
- Do not use hot tap water for drinking and cooking, since hot water draws lead from the corroded pipes. Instead, use cold tap water and heat it on the stove.
- Invest in a home water filtration system that reduces the amount of lead in your water.

This article is intended for informational purposes only and is not intended to be exhaustive, nor should any discussion or opinions be construed as professional advice. Readers should contact a health professional for appropriate advice.

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Zika: What You Should Know

A relatively new virus is prompting worldwide concern because of how quickly it is spreading across the globe. Also alarming is its connection to microcephaly, a neurological birth disorder. Transmitted by the aggressive *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, the Zika virus is rare because it can infect the fetuses of pregnant women who have the virus.

Symptoms of Zika are generally mild and include headaches, fever, rash and sometimes conjunctivitis (pink eye). Most people don't even realize that they have been infected by the virus, which is why it is such a concern for pregnant women.

The Zika virus has spread to more than 20 countries since May of 2015. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is warning pregnant women against travel to any affected areas. Furthermore, health officials in several of those countries are telling female citizens to avoid becoming pregnant, in some cases, for up to two years. Several states have confirmed the virus in individuals who traveled to areas where the virus is circulating.

Researchers are working to create a Zika vaccine. Until then, the best method of prevention is to avoid travel to areas with active infestations. If you do travel to one of these areas, be sure to wear mosquito repellent and thick clothing that covers as much of your body as possible. Unlike most mosquitos, the type that carries Zika is most active during the daytime hours until dusk, and it also prefers to be indoors. This makes it very important to use screen doors and windows and to stay in air-conditioned hotels when possible.

RICE-CRUSTED PIZZA

This is a versatile, gluten-free pizza recipe. Experiment using different kinds of rice, cheese and toppings.

- 2 cups cooked rice
- 16 ounces shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 egg
- ¼ tsp. salt
- 2 cups tomato puree

Directions

Heat the oven to 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Grease a 12-inch pizza pan or baking sheet.

Crack the egg in a mixing bowl, stirring until blended. Add the cooked rice, half of the cheese and the salt. Mix well to combine the ingredients.

Spread the rice mixture in the prepared pan, pressing firmly and making the outer edge slightly raised. Cook for 10 minutes.

Spread the tomato puree evenly over the rice mixture, and sprinkle any additional toppings over the sauce. Bake for 15 minutes. Add the remaining cheese to the top and bake for an additional five minutes to melt it.

Makes: 12 servings

Nutritional Information (per serving)

Total Calories	170
Total Fat	9 g
Protein	11 g
Carbohydrates	12 g
Dietary Fiber	1 g
Saturated Fat	5 g
Sodium	320 mg

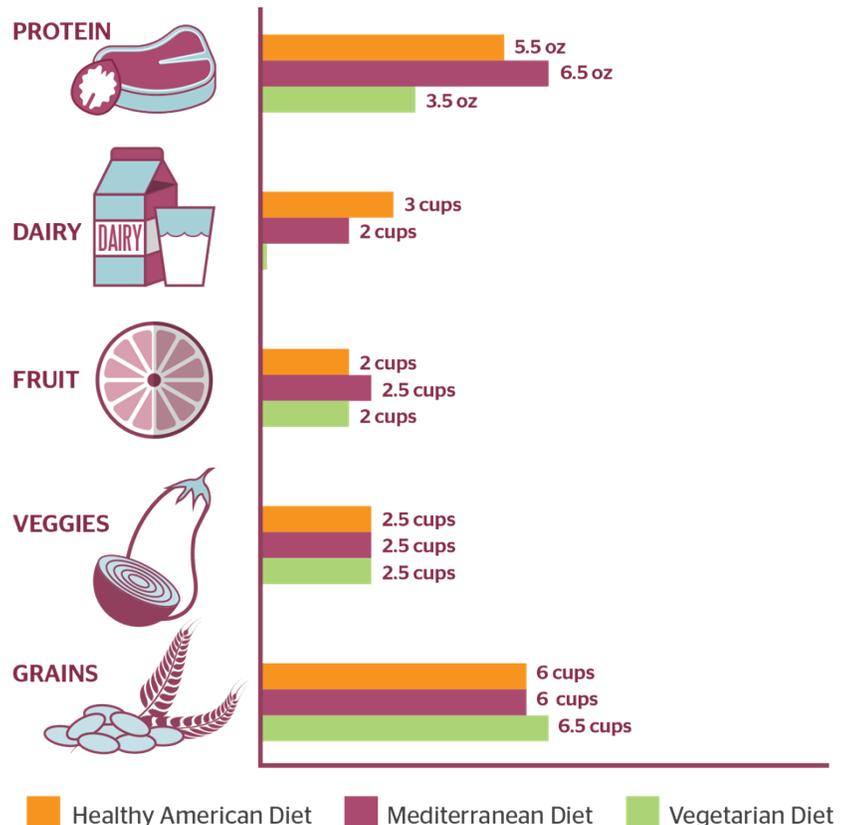
*Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet.

3 Diets to Help You Follow the New Dietary Guidelines

The new 2015-2020 federal dietary guidelines focus on the prevention of diet-related chronic diseases instead of just weight management alone. Here are three suggested diets designed around the guidelines to help make them more user-friendly:

- **Healthy American Diet:** A healthier version of what people in the United States typically consume, it suggests 2.5 cups of vegetables, 2 cups of fruit, 6 ounces of grain, 3 cups of dairy and 5.5 ounces of protein daily.
- **Mediterranean Diet:** Heavy on protein and fruits while light on dairy, this diet suggests 6.5 ounces of protein, 2.5 cups of fruit and 2 cups of dairy daily. Like the American diet, it also suggests 2.5 cups of vegetables and 6 ounces of grain daily.
- **Vegetarian Diet:** This diet only suggests 3.5 ounces of protein daily. To replace meat and seafood, it prescribes 7 ounces of nuts and seeds, as well as 8 ounces of tofu and other soy products. It also recommends 2.5 cups of vegetables, 2 cups of fruit and 6.5 ounces of grain.

*Above examples are based on a 2,000 calorie diet.



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