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Selling yourself as an employer is an important marketing effort.

by Rich Porayko

They call B.C. the Wild West. Where else would your competitor roll up on your job site and offer your crew a few bucks more an hour and a 40-pounder of Crown Royal to sweeten the deal? It's no secret, there has been a skilled labour shortage for a long time. The competition is fierce to find good people. It's a crisis across the continent. With the skill gap that we have today, you need to hire ahead of the game, not with the game. Otherwise, you are going to be poaching or others are going to be poaching from you.

The best strategy to deal with a labour shortage is to prevent turnover. Expenses associated when an employee leaves include lost business, disruption, loss of training, departure costs and reduced productivity along with the soft and hard costs of recruiting and training new people. According to Stacey Grant-Thompson, senior vice-president for strategy at Manulife Financial, those individual costs add up to about 40 per cent of an employee's salary. Using \$48,000 as the baseline average Canadian salary, Grant-Thompson says "an average turnover departure was estimated to cost about \$18,000."

Even with political uncertainty, plan on higher employment, wages and benefits. If this skill gap remains in construction, companies will need to retain their employees. And part of that is going to be paying them a little bit more.

Examine the way that you recruit talent in the first place. Company image cannot be overstated. No one wants to work for the bottom feeder. Pride in your job and employer goes a long way. Start with your fleet. If your crew is driving beat-up rust buckets, you are going to attract the type of worker that drives around in beat-up rust buckets. It is the law of attraction.

Your fleet (a.k.a. rolling billboards) is also a good place to start conscripting. Chances are your trucks are all over town, visiting customers and suppliers. They are being seen by your competition and the general public – people that might be looking for a career change. Vehicles wraps are getting more and more affordable. They look super professional and you can easily add a message saying "always hiring." Even if

you don't have any available positions, you never know who will send in a resume or when you need a pool of applications to quickly draw from. It is easier to file a CV than it is to turn on the resume tap when you are looking to hire.

Don't have the budget for a vehicle wrap? Magnetic signs are an inexpensive option. They can be quickly added or removed to a metal panel or door. Or consider having a message screen printed directly onto your next set of truck tarps.

Most municipalities have bylaws that prevent banners and signs from being hung outside, however letterboard signs are an easy and affordable way to get around those pesky bylaw officers. Plus, they can be used to advertise B2C promos or communicate with staff as they come and go. Sandwich boards and real estate signs with a recruitment message are also effective and economical.

Think social. Whether you are a fan of LinkedIn or not, the Facebook of the business world is popular with job seekers. It's a great channel to headhunt or to post a paid job ad. It's not cheap but the reports and insights available on applicants are well worth checking out. Twitter, Facebook and Instagram can be leveraged for recruiting as well.

Setting up a careers page on your website is also low-hanging fruit. It is much cheaper to post a classified ad that says, "See website for more information" than it is to pay for a long ad that is billed by the column inch. Careers pages are also gold for search engine optimization (SEO). If you have a careers page, I would bet it is in the top three to five most visited pages on your website. Pages that have more traffic and frequent updates are monitored by search engines like Google and help move your entire website to the top of the search results list.

A major perk of treating employees with respect is the more valued they feel, the more likely they are to recommend their employer to a friend or family member. Happy employees are more productive and are less likely to be poached and have to be replaced, giving you an edge on the ever-widening labour shortage.