

How to retain skilled personnel

In a tight skilled labour market with mining companies all vying for a limited pool of personnel, it's not just about recruitment – it's also about retention. Jamie Wade writes.

To attract the best skilled talent, think outside the square, innovate, be open to change, and importantly, be open to all channels to get the right people and teams on board.

This is the view of Jeffrey See, WA state manager for recruitment service provider Design & Build – a specialist end-to-end recruitment solutions firm in operation since 2004 experiencing rapid growth in the provision of services to the construction, engineering and resources sectors.

“Obviously, the skills shortage in the mining sector means less available talent and increased competition for these people. The result has been sharp increases in salary and pay rates over the last 10 years, with many companies simply throwing more money at individuals to join,” he said.

“Most believe that this approach is certainly unsustainable in the long run, as pressures mount on increased project budgets, lower profit margins and in some cases, financial blowouts as skilled workers chase the buck and leave at the drop of the hat when an additional five thousand dollars is presented to them. This increased activity in the job market has also meant that recruitment costs in the last few years have been very high.

“The sense of loyalty by both individual and company is rare these days, and if the pattern continues for much longer, the pressures to deliver on contracts and find the right skills to do a job may lead to major problems on both sides of the fence.”

To meet the challenge of attracting and retaining skilled talent, advises See, there's no silver bullet – rather a combination of solutions to consider. This includes external recruiters working closely with corporate recruitment teams, setting up employee referral programs, identifying transferrable skill sets from other sectors, being more open to training programs, providing more information and seminars for recruiting, and strategic long term planning for recruitment practices and campaigns.

Importantly, it's not all just about recruitment, says See, it is



Once you've got the right worker, how do you hold on to them as well?

very much also about retention. It's also critical that short term solutions are not the sole focus of any strategy.

“Commonly, a company's most valuable asset is its people, and keeping your own current employees at a high level of job satisfaction is a great way to get the message out to potential employees that the company culture is the right environment for them,” See told *Australian Mining*.

“The more positive messages passed on regarding the working experience at a company, the easier it becomes attracting the best talent.

“Instituting fresh and innovative policies that are actually adhered to and delivered sends a strong message to the public – including additional benefits, flexibility, and the promotion of the intangibles such as family friendly rosters, specific career steps, training etc and adds more to an individual than simply money.

“Compelling Employee Value Propositions [EVPs] that are strategic in nature, communicated well and importantly, delivered to staff goes a long way in attracting future employees, as well as retaining them.

“My advice for recruiting skilled

people: focus less on simply throwing money at individuals and more on keeping them happy.

“Forward resource planning, career development and growth initiatives, training and up-skilling offerings, flexibility in work arrangements, family-friendly rosters, in combination with competitive salaries and rates will go a long way not only in attracting skilled people, but also retaining them.”

Today's technology also allows for modern work arrangements, such as satellite offices using a universal companywide system, promoting company rather than individual state teams.

Hiring on the basis of the right attitude to the job is also important, says See, particularly where remote mining operations are concerned.

“As with most professions, the mining industry demands qualifications, relevant experience and capability in a skilled workforce. However, the mining industry demands a little more from those who work remotely in small towns – they look for people who are committed to the sector and have a genuine interest and passion for mining,” he said.

“Individuals that move to min-

ing towns without securing employment and take a risk that they may not find suitable work demonstrates commitment to companies.

Finding the right people

The boom in the mining sector in Australia has meant that attracting and recruiting skilled people has become more difficult, and certainly more competitive.

Skilled personnel in particularly high demand in the mining sector includes operators, drillers, boilermakers, fitter and turners, heavy vehicle fitters, but also white collar personnel including mining engineers, geologists, metallurgists, on-site production and maintenance supervisors, project/construction managers, multidisciplinary engineers – mechanical, electrical, structural, civil, chemical – and project controls.

Thankfully, technology has made finding the right people easier.

Where in the past print media was the first port of call for attraction and recruitment strategies, dedicated online job sites and social media are transforming recruitment and have led to marketing budgets being devoted towards digital platforms.

The increased popularity of job boards such as Seek and My Career, specialist job boards such as FIFO-Bids, Mining Jobs and MiningOil-andGas Jobs, and Social Media sites Linked In, Facebook and Twitter has changed the way we fundamentally look for work and search for skilled people in the sector.

There has also been a marked increased in the number and size of corporate recruitment teams, according to See, supplemented by an ever growing number of external recruitment firms specialising in the mining sector.

“New and unique strategies for recruitment have also become popular, including the introduction of Enterprise Migration Agreements and the number of Visa's granted for skilled workers to help keep up with the demand,” he said.

“Some companies have utilised outside-the-box strategies such as waiting for workers outside airport lounges as they return from overseas on R&R even.”