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FEATURE

Leadership Development to Ensure Success Today and in the Future

by Laura Cataldo



It is safe to say we all agree that hiring employees in this expanding economy is difficult, especially with 10,000 Baby Boomers retiring from the workforce every month. Experts predict that within the next four years, Millennials (those 38 and under today) will represent 50 percent of the workforce. Take a look at your company's management team—are you grooming the talent necessary to remain successful in the next five to 10 years? Surveys conducted by Maxim Consulting with construction companies reflect that workforce development, leadership development and continuing education are three of the top concerns that contractors have during the next three to five years.

Growing the leadership pipeline in your organization begins from the moment you bring a potential

candidate onboard. Getting employees in the door is only the first step. Retaining and growing the leadership capabilities of employees is more critical than ever and requires an effective plan of:

- Onboarding the Right Talent
- Performance Management
- Coaching and Training
- Career Planning and Succession

In the past, the typical response to building the leadership pipeline was to start a search to hire senior level talent. That is not a successful plan in today's labor market. A recent construction industry survey reported that 89 percent of contractors find it very difficult or somewhat difficult to find senior talent. Unless you have unlimited financial resources and a strong recruitment process, it is doubtful you will be successful

in hiring experienced employees with leadership skills. For most contractors, the reality is that you must develop the leadership abilities in your employees because it will become increasingly harder to hire them.

Employee Development Is What Millennials Want

PwC conducted a Millennials Survey to determine what factors make an employer attractive. Two of the three top responses for employer attractiveness are related to employee development:

- Opportunities for career progression
- Competitive wages and financial incentives
- Excellent training and development programs

Does your company offer career progression and training and development programs for your employees? Construction is an industry that relies heavily on education of many sorts: apprenticeship for skilled trades, drafting and technology training through technical colleges, and engineering and construction programs at the university level. But historically, we are not an industry that has stressed ongoing education or advanced degrees. While budgets and workloads change with the economy, impacting your company's ability to invest in training and development, it will be increasingly important to make this investment in order to build your future leadership.

Building Balance—Soft Skills for the Technical Professionals

The majority of the construction workforce is composed of technically trained professionals such as the skilled trades, engineers, and estimators. Their educational training is founded on learning the technical or "hard skills" of their profession. They understand constructability, scheduling, materials, labor management and estimating. They excel in their respective positions because they have the technical skills necessary for the job. Yet, many of these same "experts" struggle with the people-focused or "soft skills" such as leadership, communication, negotiation, problem-solving, decision-making, team building or motivating.

Why is it that the super-star project manager that brings every job in under budget and on-time, fails when moved into a position of leading others? Technical skills are critical to project success, but without applying the right set of soft skills, the employee won't be successful. We understand the impact that training and development has on the ability to grow future leadership, but we cannot forget the impact that this investment can have on every project. Look at the top 10 reasons that projects fail and it is apparent that lack of soft skills are

largely to blame.

- Poor leadership at any and all levels
- Failure to adequately identify, document, and track requirements
- Cultural and ethical misalignment
- Misalignment between project team and business/organization it serves
- Inadequate communication, including progress tracking and reporting
- Inadequate or misused methods
- Inadequately trained or inexperienced project managers
- Failure to set and manage expectations
- Poor plans and planning processes
- Poor effort estimation

A training and development program that incorporates both technical and soft skills is critical to recruiting and retaining employees, building a leadership pipeline, and company-wide project success. It is highly recommended that companies utilize outside resources to assist in the development and delivery of leadership training and coaching to maximize the impact. Outside resources often have proven content and delivery processes that help accelerate the deployment internally without having to re-create the wheel.

Training needs can be met with

an internal development program, through external educational opportunities (association, Chamber of Commerce, apprenticeship program or area colleges), or through a combination of the two. An ideal employee development program incorporates:

- Soft skills (negotiation, leadership, public speaking, etc.)
- Technical skills (systems and process)
- Industry-specific knowledge (BIM, LEED, etc.)

You will see the return on your investment in the profitability and success of each project and build the skills necessary for employees to lead your organization into the future.

Laura Cataldo, associate director at Maxim Consulting Group, works with construction organizations of all sizes to evaluate business practices and assist with management challenges. Having worked in the construction industry for over 20 years, Cataldo offers a depth of experience working with contractors, associations and workforce partners to improve profitability and succeed in the changing marketplace. She understands the challenges of today's construction industry and is keenly in touch with future trends. Cataldo can be reached at (608) 616-2835 or laura.cataldo@maximconsulting.com.

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