

## Go Green or Go Home

BY TIMOTHY R. JOHNSON

Keeping with the green movement is crucial to recruitment and retention.

**MOST HIRING FIRMS HOPE FOR** that extra edge when looking to take on new talent. Sometimes that edge is a curve that firms need to keep ahead of, and knowing the growing trends is always important. As a recruiter for the building and design industry, I commonly ask recruited candidates, “What are you looking for in a new opportunity?”

More and more often lately, I’ve heard the response: “To work more with green building and sustainable design.” With the baby-boomer generation retiring, and a shortage of new architects and engineers entering the industry, what exactly does going green mean for building and design firms in need of top-talent professionals? I’ll break it down for you.

### The Times, they are a Changin’

First, let’s look at this in terms of keeping with the times. I’ll quickly reiterate what is no doubt a commonly used, but highly appropriate, theme: The professional services sector is similar to, say, the business of product technology. Do you think a company that got its start selling AM radios over fifty years ago would survive today if it stubbornly refused to expand its offered products and manufactured only outdated audio products in a world of iPods and MP3 players? Likewise, as green building and sustainable design become the new hot trend in the building and design industry, it behooves firms that offer such services to keep with these trends.

Instead of attracting consumers to purchase products, put recruiting top-talent professionals under the keeping-with-the-times lens. What does this have to do with going green? More and more work in green building and sustainable design presents itself to the AE industry as time goes on. According to *Greener Buildings*, a report by market research firm SBI finds that “the booming green building market will continue its rapid expansion through 2011,” increasing to more than \$4.7 billion in that time. The report also notes that, while the growth may slow slightly in percentage—still remaining over 15% annually—the green building boom will continue despite the current building slowdown in the U.S. These findings suggest that continued work for those focused on green building and de-

sign will not only produce revenue—which is always a great thing, of course—but will also go far in attracting prospective employees.

One of the primary concerns recruited candidates raise, especially during an economic slowdown, centers on the workload of the hiring firm and uncertainty over a lack of work, which often leads to layoffs. Firms that focus on the growing market sector of green building and sustainable design will be more attractive to top-notch candidates for reasons of recognized workload availability, progressive growth, and employment stability.

### Environmental Interest

According to a recent survey, conducted by Monster Trak, the majority of college graduates today are seeking employment opportunities with companies that help the environment. The survey revealed that roughly 80% of the new wave of professionals entering the workforce wants jobs that have a positive impact on the environment, including work with green building and sustainable design. And if you want to take a moment to talk dollar signs, you might be interested to note that some respondents to the survey stated that they would work for less money if it meant being part of a more environmentally conscious organization.

In his book *101 Ways to Turn Your Business Green*, Rich Mintzer explains that, “as a green company, you will be in a far better position to attract top talent,” due to the increasing number of environmentally conscious professionals entering the workforce.

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—Monster Trak survey results

Now I’m not saying that you need to start serving your employees all-organic food or go out and stock up on a two-year supply of carbon offsets, but what I am saying is that there is an increasing amount of available work out there in green building and sustainable design, a focus that continues to grow.

What can firms in building and design do to implement green practices and further develop services to include sustainability? A recent interview I conducted with ASHRAE (American Society of Heating and Refrigeration Engineers) Distinguished Lecturer, Vincent Sakraida, reveals some key points to consider.

Sakraida, a LEED Accredited Professional engineer and recognized leader with international engineering firm Jacobs Engineering, has been involved in green building design for more than twenty years. He breaks down the best approach to bringing a firm up to speed on green building and sustainable design services into four simple steps:

First, firms can become involved in prominent green building associations, such as the United States Green Building Council (USGBC). Step two requires the assessment of internal employee and overall firm experience with green building work and calls for the creation of a focused green building and sustainability group within the firm.

The next step is to implement a formal introductory training program for all employees, with an overview seminar on green building, sustainability, and LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design). Education programs should be established, as well, to provide continuous training and keep employees up to date on evolving trends.

The last step is to require professionally registered employees to becoming LEED Accredited.

### **Filling the Gap**

Over the course of the next two decades, thousands of baby boomers per day will reach retirement age. Currently the number of new professionals entering the building and design industry is not enough to fill in all these gaps. The new professionals, perhaps more so than ever before, have their eyes open for opportunities in green building and sustainable design, recognizing it as an option of security and growth, the future of their industry. Indeed it is no coincidence that more than 50,000 people have become LEED Accredited Professionals since the certification began in 2001.

Firms in building and design that keep with the times and seek out more green focused work will not only do well to increase workload and revenue, they will also vastly improve their ability to recruit and retain top-talent professionals at a time when doing so becomes increasingly difficult. **MSC**

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