(Note: This article originally appeared the October/November 2008 edition of Bridges, the online publication of APWA. It was written by five young professional members of APWA. Prior to 2012, the young professionals had been a part of the Diversity Committee. The advice on how to recruit and retain and engage younger workers at your agency or firm is still applicable today).

Recruiting for the Future

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Ever wonder what younger professionals are really looking for in a Public Works job?

This year’s Recruiting for the Future session at Congress provided a unique opportunity to allow recruiting managers to hear firsthand what workers are seeking in a job. Five employees with less than 7 years of work experience sat down and provided a candid description of what they look for in a job and why they are staying in their current positions.

From the Recruiting for the Future session, here are a few suggestions for recruiting and retaining young professionals:

Tips for Recruiting New Talent

1. Actively recruit for desired talent:
Attend career fairs, advertise in trade magazines, and join online job sites, such as Monster.com, to attract talent. Make sure you "show off" your workplace with high gloss photos of construction sites, employees "engaged" in problem solving, and work life when displaying at fairs and in magazines.

2. Don't just sell your organization; sell the location, community, and atmosphere:
Prospective employees aren't just coming to work at "the office", they are coming to live in your community. Inform them of the special things (attractions, schools, night-life, family opportunities) offered throughout the community.

3. Offer relocation assistance:
Relocating to a new job is a heavy expense, especially for new graduates. Offer assistance to help offset those costs.
4. **Offer Leadership development and educational training opportunities:**
Advertise what your organization can do to supplement day-to-day job activities. The more opportunities available the more likely you will land a new recruit.

5. **Provide an Ambassador Program:**
Develop an Ambassador Program to engage the new hires with employees of similar age and get acquainted with the work environment. A non-supervisory ambassador should be able to answer all of the little questions like "How do I brew a new pot of coffee?" or "Do we get Flag Day off?"

6. **Offer staggered or flexible work schedules:**
Some are early risers and some have kids to usher off to school. Allow your employees the flexibility to work 7am-4pm or 9am-6pm depending on their personal preferences.

7. **Offer internships during college:**
Summer internships are attractive to college students looking to get an early start on career experience. They are also a great way to for new talent excited about the work and interested in coming back after graduation.

8. **Support Professional Development:**
Younger employees are looking for an employer that is committed to supporting their development as a professional. Be sure to support involvement in professional organizations such as APWA!

9. **Provide continuing educational reimbursement for qualified expenses:**
Help pay for those master's degrees! Providing tuition reimbursement will attract younger workers and keep those high level employees longer.

10. **Work with the local schools to train future employees:**
The Public Works Department of Pinellas County and the APWA West Coast Branch has worked with the Pinellas County Schools to develop the Public Works Academy. The Academy provides training in front-line public works fields such as tradeworkers, inspectors, and foremen. Through the program, students can earn a technical training completion certificate and become a vital part of the Public Works field.

**Tips for Keeping Good Talent**

1. **Give them responsibility as soon as they start:**
Individuals seeking a new job, whether right after college or changing jobs, are always eager to contribute in a meaningful way from the first minute on the job. Having a specific duty available which will offer personal responsibility will show a new recruit that they are needed in order for your organization to be successful.
2. **Never let them get bored:**
The younger workforce is looking for a fast paced, multi-tasking job that allows them to work on large variety of tasks and projects. Provide continuous opportunities in their profession to grow intellectually, experientially, and professionally to keep them engaged and interested in their jobs.

3. **Look to the future; get a succession plan in place:**
Younger workers want interesting work today, but also want to know what opportunities are available tomorrow. Have a succession plan in place, including steps to grow today’s new talent into tomorrow’s leaders and managers.

4. **Allow older workers to mentor younger workers:**
Allowing younger workers to learn from the depth of experience and knowledge of others in the office can really help them out and provides the perfect opportunity to transfer knowledge in your organization.

5. **Let them know they are appreciated:**
Everyone wants to feel appreciated and to be thanked for job well done. Positive feedback is especially important for younger workers. Rule of thumb: be sure to provide about twice as much positive feedback for younger workers than older workers.

6. **Offer healthy living incentives:**
In exchange for documented healthy living activities, provide help with Prescription expenses, doctor's co-pays, and day care expenses. Providing allowances for gym memberships is also a great way to help keep your folks and keep them healthy.

7. **Provide performance incentives:**
Weather you provide performance bonuses, a paid day-off, or just a pat on the back with a certificate, having this policy can be one of the easiest ways to retain employees. Be creative and offer tickets to the theme parks, movies, or 18 holes of golf!

8. **Cultivate a team work environment:**
A relaxed and family oriented work atmosphere provides a setting to build personal relationships among co-workers. It is easy to replace the source of a paycheck but it is hard to replace the source of friendship.

9. **Plan extra-curricular activities:**
Providing extra-curricular activities allows for the employees to build personal relationships outside of a work setting. Extra-curricular activities can be team sports such as softball, kickball, volleyball and basketball or group activities such as being part of a book club allow employee to get to know one another. Even in the in-office activities, such as monthly luncheons where anyone can pitch in $5 - $7 and have food catered in to the office will work. These extra activities allow employees to build their teamwork and communication skills which come to fruition on the job.
10. **Encourage employee outings:**
Provide random or yearly activities for employees and their families. One organization provides free admission to a major zoo for the whole family once a year. Other examples can include fun activities for the group or department during work hours called a "day away" for team building exercises. Make people feel as part of a family because they work for you!

11. **Allow flexible work hours from week to week:**
A work-life balance is important and younger workers want the ability to sometimes work extra hours Monday through Thursday and leave early Friday or to work extra on Tuesday to take off time for a Wednesday activity. Having the ability to make up hours for things such as dentist appointments, doctor visits, or school programs (or a visit with the principal!) instead of using vacation time allows for true stress relieving and relaxing vacations.

**Other things you need to know**

**Flexible Time:**
For recruiting and retention, flexible work time was on the top on everyone’s wish list. While some prefer staggered schedules such as the ability to work 9 to 6 to accommodate school drop-offs, everyone wants the ability to take off two hours for a dentist appointment and make up the time later in the week. Flex time is seen as a tool to provide work-life balance and the consensus is that it would be hard to go to an organization that does not allow flex time.

“*Flex time, the ability to work extra hours Monday through Thursday and leave early Friday, allows for the occasional use of Friday afternoon as travel time for a weekend trip. My extended family lives 3 hours from me. Being able to arrive in time for a Friday evening dinner with family or friends is one of the "over the top" benefits I enjoy.”* - Aaron Keller

**College Recruitment:**
All of the panelists were recruited into their fields straight out of college. Some were even recruited while in college:

“*My career in terms of recruiting and retention at HNTB began when I was hired into a well-developed intern program at HNTB. One of the best parts of the intern program was that I was immediately tasked with challenges that recent graduates would be presented with. The well-developed intern program did a lot to retain me as I returned for a second internship the following year, as well as for full time employment upon college graduation.*” - Jay McArdle
**Recruiting Non-Engineers:**
Chas Jordan, the only non-engineer in the group, spoke about the role that non-engineering staff, such as budget analysts and public administrators, have in Public Works and the importance of recruiting them:

“Public Works is the cornerstone of local government, providing services directly to the citizenry. Now with the economy in a downturn and government accountability being the key term for our citizens, it is time for Public Works Departments to locate and recruit professionals outside the engineering field. While having skilled engineers is the backbone of most Public Works Departments, the need for skilled financial analysts, managers, and public administrators is larger than ever.“

**General Advice:**
Be patient with younger workers. Young professionals understand that our more experienced mentors and supervisors may not be as technologically astute as we are, but also remember that we are used to working in a multi-tasking environment, and in so doing, are not trying to disrespect you if we pull out the laptop or cell phone in a meeting.

**Retention:**
Overall, young professionals are looking for opportunities to grow professionally and personally at work. Opportunities for professional development, membership in professional organizations, social networking, and extra-curricular activities will attract and keep them in your department.