FINDING GOOD WORKERS IN A BAD LABOR MARKET

It’s not easy, but here are some ideas that will help

By Amy Willer

THE 2024 POOL SEASON IS in full swing, service pros are working their routes, new construction projects are in various stages of completion, customers are stocking up on supplies to get them through the summer. But what does this really mean for the pool, spa, and hot tub industry workforce?

For the past year, the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance (PHTA) has been regularly surveying pool maintenance and service companies, builders and designers, retailers, and portable hot tub retailers and installers to gain a deeper understanding of industry trends and business operations. Consistently, the second biggest challenge reported by survey participants has been recruiting and retaining skilled employees — second only to economic factors such as inflation and interest rates.

At the same time, nearly 70% of survey participants believe their sales will increase over the next 12 months. In order to keep up, all sectors (service and maintenance, build, and retail) are looking to increase their number of employees. Service companies in particular have been seeing a rise in employee numbers, indicating an expansion in operations to meet increasing demand.

What can employers do to entice qualified, skilled job seekers to fill their open positions — and keep them in those positions? PHTA has some suggestions.

WRITE CLEAR JOB DESCRIPTIONS

Job seekers won’t know that you’re hiring if you don’t share your open positions! But it’s about more than spreading the word; it’s about spreading the right
words. When writing a job description and subsequent job posting, be sure to use relevant keywords and phrases (such as “pool service technician,” “hot tub sales,” or “swim instructor”) and be specific in what you are looking for and what you are offering.

Think about the details that matter to the job applicant, such as duties and responsibilities, qualifications and necessary skills, and information about company benefits. More and more jurisdictions are requiring that salary ranges be included in job postings, and many job seekers won’t even bother applying for a position if a salary isn’t listed.

MEET JOB SEEKERS WHERE THEY ARE
Cast your net as wide as possible. There is such a broad range of careers in the pool, spa, and hot tub industry that you should also be able to find a broad range of qualified applicants. Don’t limit your search to the “average” worker just because that is who you have hired in the past — that limits your chances of success.

- Military veterans have skills that are easily transferred to our industry, from effective communication and teamwork to physical stamina and technical skills.
- Women have traditionally been underrepresented in our industry, with only 9.1% of pool technicians and 3.5% of pool builders being women.
- Determine which roles at your company truly require a college degree. Many high school students are eager to dive right into their careers rather than pursue a four-year degree.

TRAIN NEW EMPLOYEES
Sometimes a promising job applicant has the right soft skills but is lacking the technical skills. That shouldn’t necessarily disqualify them, because there are opportunities for on-the-job training that benefit both you as the employer and them as the employee.

PHTA has two apprenticeship programs registered with the U.S. Department of Labor, one for pool maintenance and service technicians and one for pool installer technicians. These programs lead apprentices through 2,000 or more hours of on-the-job training, plus an additional 144 or more hours of independent study through PHTA on-demand educational programs.

Apprenticeship programs are a win-win situation. Employers are able to more easily attract and retain employees, develop highly skilled employees, reduce turnover, and increase productivity. Apprentices who participate in the program increase their skills, are able to earn a living while learning the profession, receive a national credential, and have a clear pathway towards career advancement.

Having registered apprenticeship programs specifically for the pool industry allows us to be more competitive with other industries looking for entry-level talent. As
an apprenticed occupation, we are now considered a skilled trade. This opens doors with high school guidance counselors, military veteran employment programs, and community workforce boards — which can help you reach those same audiences aforementioned that will diversify your workforce.

**SUPPORT CONTINUING EDUCATION**

The pool, spa, and hot tub industry is constantly evolving, and it's important for your staff to be up to date on the latest best practices. Few things show employees you care more than supporting their continuing education and career growth. Investing in your individual team members is an investment in the overall success and profitability of your company.

From industry trade shows and conferences to professional certifications like the PHTA Certified Pool & Spa Operator (CPO) and GENESIS construction, design, and engineering courses, there is always more to learn. In fact, PHTA offers two certification pathways to encourage professionals to increase their skills and reach new heights.

The PHTA Certified Pool Service Professional Pathway puts you and your team on the right track to master your trade. This pathway begins with the CPO certification and continues through the Certified Pool & Spa Maintenance Specialist (CMS), then the Certified Pool & Spa Service Technician (CST) and finally, the Certified Pool & Spa Service Professional (CSP). Those following the pathway build upon their existing knowledge base and grow in their service career.

The PHTA Certified Pool Builder & Design Professional Pathway sets the standard of excellence for professional builders and designers, providing consumers protection and confidence. Those interested in the pathway begin with the Certified Builder Professional (CBP), then work their way through a variety of GENESIS construction, design, and engineering courses to achieve their Advanced CBP, Expert CBP, and finally Master CBP.

Although these certifications, and other industry education programs, cost both time and money, it is in the employer's best interest to support their team.

**GET STARTED TODAY**

PHTA is here to help! Our Work In Aquatics workforce development initiative is constantly driving job seekers and those interested in learning more about the pool, spa, and hot tub industry to our dedicated workinaquatics.com website, where they can find information on career paths, training, and apprenticeships, and more. Plus, those who are ready to apply today can visit the Work In Aquatics online job board and find hundreds of open positions from companies in the pool, spa, and hot tub industry. Let PHTA help you find, train, and retain your workforce.

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