



BATTLING A LABOR SHORTAGE:

How Lumber Businesses Can
Address Worker Shortages and
Build a More Inclusive Workplace

By Carla Corrado and Sam Matthews

The talent crisis continues to plague the nation, with 77% of employers reporting difficulties filling roles, which is a 17-year high. The lumber industry is no exception to this issue. Like so many other industries, employers in lumber are experiencing a labor shortage due to a lack of interested and qualified workers.

In an industry challenged by significant risks on a daily basis, a talent shortage can lead to dangerous working conditions and, ultimately, accidents and costly insurance claims.

When it comes to attracting and retaining quality talent, we believe the keys lie in raising awareness of the rewarding careers we offer, knowing where to look for candidates, and providing an environment where all people want to work.

TELL THEM WHO WE ARE

Not many are aware of what work in the lumber industry looks like today or the wide range of opportunities it offers. In addition to the wood manufacturing and machinery work associated with our industry, businesses need to fill sales, marketing, accounting, and other traditional business roles. These roles are often overlooked throughout the lumber industry, but they are critical to how it operates and evolves.

On the manufacturing side, workers in the industry not only have the opportunity to hone their craft, but they can also work with new technology that is defining the future of the industry—technology that is making the job safer, more environmentally friendly, and, in many cases, enabling workers to produce superior products.

Ultimately, working in the lumber industry is rewarding because we take what nature provides and turn it into something that benefits society. At Pennsylvania Lumbermens Mutual Insurance Company, we like to remind our employees that trees and nature are at the root of everything we do. As such, we send each new employee a young tree when they join PLM to remind them that as the tree grows, so will their career at PLM.

Finally, our industry is attractive because of its dedication to helping individuals develop and hone useful skills. Lumber and building material dealers often offer training and apprenticeships to help new employees develop skills or existing employees hone them.

KNOW WHERE TO FIND THEM

Once you've identified why potential employees might want to join our workforce, you'll need to go out and find them. Some of the best places to attract new talent may include:


- **SCHOOLS:** Reach out to local high schools and trade schools to see if they'd be interested in hearing from staff on career days or at similarly themed events.
- **SOCIAL MEDIA:** Take pictures in the workplace and at events and post those across LinkedIn, Twitter, and Instagram. Show the best of the business so prospective employees are compelled to inquire.
- **YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY:** Attend local charitable events and networking events, and consider joining local business groups. When possible, sponsor community events and see if the organizers will allow a representative to speak briefly about what the company does and the value of a career in the industry.

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CREATE A FRIENDLY ENVIRONMENT

Across different industries, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have become core values in the workplace. We know potential employees want to work in an inclusive workplace, but what steps can lumber businesses take to create a more diverse business where their staff feels valued? Here are some best practices to consider:

- **OFFER EMPLOYEES A GREATER VOICE:** Give employees frequent opportunities to share their perspectives on the workplace and what they believe could be done better. Offer employees of similar backgrounds a forum where they can get together.
- **CONSIDER LANGUAGE TRAINING:** In an industry that employs staff from a variety of backgrounds, having managers take the time to learn other languages can demonstrate dedication to employees. Even just learning basic phrases can help showcase an appreciation for their background and make employees feel more welcome.
- **PRIORITIZE EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION:** Building a family culture in the workplace may sound cliché, but it's the right way to go. Here at PLM, we send out small gifts to our staff throughout the year so they feel valued. Our senior staff learns the names of all new employees, and they interact with our team on a regular basis. Small practices like these make a big difference in building relationships and, ultimately, employee happiness.

As our industry continues to battle a labor shortage, a renewed focus on raising awareness of how rewarding a career in lumber can be, as well as the efforts we're making to bring it into the future, will help connect with the next generation and keep our businesses staffed with superior talent. 

About the author: Carla Corrado is manager of talent development at Pennsylvania Lumbermens Mutual Insurance Company. Sam Matthews is recruiting manager for Pennsylvania Lumbermens Mutual Insurance Company. You can reach them at ccorrado@plmins.com and smatthews@plmins.com, respectively.