



**I**n the past year, a common thread has been running through the hundreds of discussions I have had with surveyors across the country—the subject of well-trained employees.

While most companies are desperate to find employees who are both dependable *and* experienced, at the very least they seek employees who are dependable, dedicated, and trainable.

One company in New Mexico hasn't hired any employees in the past five years simply because there were no qualified individuals to hire. Similar tales of frustration are echoed in South Dakota, California, Texas, Virginia, Georgia and nearly every state in the nation. Then there are organizations like the BLM—how easy do you suppose it is to recruit interns to embark on an Alaskan adventure and work for peanuts?

Where are all the great employees? Where are all the experienced surveyors? What's going on? There seems to be about as many surveyors as there were 25 years ago. The problem is that land surveying education, training, and employment have not kept up with the demands of the industry. The schools produce at least a small number of these folks, which might be a good reason

# Desperate Surveyors

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to reconsider education as a source for new hires instead of letting it fester as a divisive force between surveyors.

So how can my business grow, or how can I compete if I'm constantly spending large amounts of time looking for that elusive experienced surveyor?

Government agencies compete with the private sector from the same pool

of candidates. With only about 250,000 people competing for land surveying jobs, it's a daunting task for any employer or HR manager to find that one special person to fill a job opening.

The good news: There's actually a very good chance that you will find your candidate. There are twice as many active job seekers (either cur-

rently working and looking for another company, or unemployed) as there are job listings.

Unless Mr. X or Ms. Y just happens to call your office one day inquiring about possible employment, the best way to find new hires is through ad placement. The problem with most ad placements is that there is no one on the other side helping to push those job seekers to your door.

Here are problems, common traps and solutions to attract the best talent.

**Problem:** You have placed ads in newspapers, magazines, and on the Internet, but you are getting little or no response. This might be a result of ads that deliver the wrong message, are vague, or have little appeal.

**Solution:** The best job listings include several key factors, “job-seeker friendly”

and the way an employee will be treated once he or she applies. Provide salary information in numbers, not empty phrases like “competitive” or “based on experience.” Give a detailed description of the skills and experience the candidate will need to be successful in the position. Provide complete information about the organization’s benefits, advancement policies and work arrangements (for example, flexible workday possible). Include a statement that ensures the candidate’s privacy will be protected should he or she apply.

**Problem:** You have a limited budget for advertising job openings.


**Solution:** Look for places to place ads for free. Call the career placement center of your local technical college, university or school. Many schools now

explain any gaps in employment and verify them if possible.

**Problem:** Not knowing whom you are hiring. How do they interact with clients? How do they get along with others? Can they manage money?

**Solution:** Besides calling past employers, this solution is obvious, but catching on more slowly in the surveying world. Perform a background check on your best candidate before committing to any employment. Bad drivers, drug addicts, alcoholics, would-be thieves, and abusers are often identified through a background check. My surveying company does this for all new hires—we check criminal, driving and financial records. I once hired an administrative person and three days into the job I learned that the person had been arrested for embezzling \$5K from the last employer. That’s not something I could have detected just from a friendly conversation! I felt like I dodged a bullet that time. It was the best \$34 I’ve spent on any employee.

**Problem:** An employee has been promoted beyond his or her ability. Simply put, these types of employees are referred to as “button pushers.” Employers slyly get rid of these folks quietly, sometimes passing them off to neighboring companies without full disclosure. Finding another job for a bad employee prevents them from filing for unemployment. The problem shows up when the “new” employee’s skills are not up to snuff and the new employer realizes that the company got stuck with an overpaid, untrained employee, and that it is now their problem.

**Solution:** Be honest with your employees about their abilities and skills. It is not fair to either the company or the employee to allow them to believe that they are more skilled than they really are. In future articles, we’ll discuss important issues relating to employees, employers, careers within geomatics, job outlook, training, making the most of your career, and the role, definition and expectation of each player. 

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## “How can I compete if I’m constantly spending large amounts of time looking for that elusive experienced surveyor?”

phrases, and important details.

**KEY FACTORS** What will the employee get to do? What will he or she be able to learn or accomplish? Whom will he or she work with?

### **JOB-SEEKER FRIENDLINESS**

What does the ad say about your company’s culture? Does it show that your organization goes the extra distance to help virtual strangers (such as online job-seekers)? If so, it’s likely to go even further to support and advance its employees.

Provide all of the information a candidate will need to make an informed decision about the opening. Anticipate possible questions about the job and provide complete and candid answers before they’re even asked. Offer a way for questions to be answered for any issue not covered in the ad. Include detailed instructions about how to send a resume over the Internet when applying for the job.

**DETAILS** The best job listings are rich in data. They include specific information about your organization,

charge for these ad placements, but many remain free. The downside is that you’ll probably only receive resumes from students with no experience but who can be hired at a much lower cost.

**Problem:** You’ve probably heard the cliché “He didn’t have 10 years of experience; he had one year of experience 10 times.” Therefore, even though a resume may be quite impressive, how can you tell what skills or experience your new guy has?

**Solution:** 1) Give all field applicants a short 10 minute test, with perhaps five questions and no calculator. Test on “the basics” that will cover the types of surveys your company performs, and include at least one question that can only be answered by “Calling the office” or “Calling my supervisor for more instructions.” Include a question that cannot be answered correctly mathematically; 2) Call immediate past employers and talk with the last supervisor. Ask if the candidate is eligible for rehire. Have the candidate