3 Reasons You Can't Hire Enough Engineers

If your company employs engineers, one thing is true. You are having a very difficult time adding or replacing engineering talent in your operations. ManpowerGroup, a leading HR consulting company, in its report titled Focus on Engineering 2017 says,

> Engineers have appeared on the list of hardest to fill jobs in the U.S. for **the past nine years**; globally, engineers are the fourth most difficult to fill position. Competition for top engineering talent continues to challenge employers, requiring them to **reexamine attraction** and retention strategies.[1]

The report shows the top four hardest to fill job openings in the US are mechanical, electrical, manufacturing, and chemical engineers in that order. One of the top reasons employers list for prolonged engineering vacancies is a lack of applicants. Further, 82% of companies employing engineers struggle to fill openings, and 95% plan to hire more engineers.

Here are three reasons preventing you from hiring enough engineers, and what you can do about that.

Reason #1 – There are not enough engineers to go around. As indicated above, the supply/demand dynamic for engineers is out of balance and has been for some time. As this accelerates in what appears to be a business cycle uptick in the manufacturing sector the competition for engineering talent will get fierce. According to CareerBuilder data, 4.2 million current engineering openings exist in the US. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows that unemployment is just 2.1% for bachelors degree holders with some work experience.

Solution #1 – Admit to yourself you are in a fierce competitive battle for engineering talent. Get senior management and your HR group on board with not just doing more of the same. You need to do things differently, and do different things if you are to win in the talent war.

Reason #2 – You don't know how to attract top engineering talent. 98% of job openings posted on corporate websites and job boards do almost nothing to attract talent, especially top tier talent. These job openings are almost entirely skills and experience based, i.e., degrees required, years of experience desired, systems experience preferred, etc. People, especially top tier people bring all of this, but are not attracted by these to your company's openings.

Solution #2 – Top tier talent is attracted to opportunities to make an impact on and at an organization. You need to speak in terms of the impact, challenges, opportunity for growth, and overall responsibilities the position entails. Outcomes, performance expected, recognition and reward are the language top people respond to. Rewrite your job description to lead with and emphasize these.

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[1] ManpowerGroup Report: Focus on Engineering 2017: http://www.experisjobs.us/Website-File-Pile/Whitepapers/Experis/engineering-whitepaper.pdf

Reason #3 – **You don't know how to interview determine performers from pretenders.** Most hiring managers and HR personnel are not skilled and equipped to effectively interview candidates to determine high level performers: A players, or at least B+ players. Just verbalizing a skills and experience based position description (see above) and asking how well this describes them is *not* an effective interview. Poor interviewing skills turns off highly talented candidates. Effectiveness and productivity of top tier engineers can be the equivalent of two or more average or below average engineers.

Solution #3 – Invest in training for hiring managers and HR personnel to upgrade their interviewing skills. Utilize performance-based and behavior interviewing methods to get beyond basic questions and answers dealing experience and skills only. Leadership, internal drive, motivations, aspirations, and people skills are what separate performers from pretenders. Hiring engineers is hard enough. Stack your organization with top tier talent to minimize the number of engineers you need to do the work necessary. Top tier engineers are attracted to significant, challenging, fully absorbing roles.

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