

HOW TO



HIRE

BY KENNETH J. BOHAN, CPC, CTS

With a workforce in flux, property management executives are implementing increasingly sophisticated hiring strategies to ensure their firms are stocked with top talent.

Multifamily housing companies today face a number of new challenges in the search to find and secure top talent. This process gets more difficult with the dynamics of the workforce constantly changing due to fluctuations in unemployment, combined with the influx of the Millennial Generation (born between about 1980 and 2000) and exit of many Baby Boomers (born between about 1946 and 1964) from the market. It is not enough just to hire someone qualified to do the job. Companies must find someone with savvy interpersonal skills who also fits the company culture and vision and who has the passion and motivation to make a difference.

According to a three-year study by Leadership IQ, a global leadership training and research company, 46 percent of newly hired employees will fail within 18 months, while only 19 percent will achieve unequivocal success. A lack of technical skills is not the primary reason why new hires fail; instead, poor interpersonal skills dominate the list. The study found that 26 percent of new hires fail because they can't accept feedback, 23 percent because they're unable to understand and manage emotions, 17 percent because they lack the necessary motivation to excel, 15 percent because they have the wrong temperament for the job, and only 11 percent because they lack the necessary technical skills.

In this article, executives at some of the largest and most innovative property management companies give their views on challenges and changes in their hiring processes and provide insight on tactics that have led them to success.

The good news is that companies are implementing processes of increasing sophistication to identify the right talent to grow their businesses. Recognizing that there are myriad factors that need to be considered in predicting a new hire's potential success is a second step. Adopting solutions that address these challenges will result in increased productivity and tenure.

With that said, the human factor remains paramount. Whether the economy is in hyper growth or recession, the challenges surrounding effective hiring skills remain a blend of both science and art.

Q. What are your greatest hiring challenges in the years ahead?

One of the primary challenges in the hiring process is the economy, says Katie Miles-Ley, Senior Vice President of Human Resources at UDR, a real estate investment trust with 58,796 apartments.



"[The Millennial Generation's] values, motivations and employment objectives differ significantly from those of previous generations."

Katie Miles-Ley
Senior VP of Human Resources
UDR
Highlands Ranch, Colo.

"It undeniably plays a major role in how we recruit. The primary effect is that we get more applicants and it takes more time and effort to identify those that are best qualified."

As applicants and other hiring authorities use more technology, Miles-Ley says it is a challenge to look beyond just online applications and be more receptive to the various social media sites that people use to "advertise" their capabilities and availability.

An additional concern is making UDR's hiring processes more efficient and timely. "We had to streamline our internal hiring processes," states Miles-Ley. "One way we were able to achieve success with this effort is the implementation of a detailed electronic on-boarding process. This conversion to an online process includes the application, background and pre- and post-employment verification, including legal compliance documentation, and ends with the new employee orientation.

"Integral to this online capability is the implementation of an automated tracking systems application. This innovation allows us to build a better 'pipeline' to source for qualified candidates. We are constantly actively recruiting. We do not wait until we need a new hire to start identifying candidates. We start having dialogue with candidates early with the intention of possibly making an offer at a later date, when needed."

Ensuring a successful pre-boarding experience and on-boarding experience is an important challenge, confirms Mary Copeland, Senior Vice President of Human Resources for Bell Partners Inc., a real estate investment and management company with 59,000 apartments in 206 communities. "The first 90 days is so critical

Mobile Hiring

The use of mobile devices is expanding into more and more aspects of the apartment industry, and that includes human resources. Last year saw extraordinary growth in new recruiting strategies, with mobile-based recruiting strategies leading the charge, says Matt Charney, Social Media Engagement Manager for Monster, in an article, “Top 11 in ’11 Social Media Trends.” Following are two of the trends he identified.

1. Mobile hiring. CITA-The Wireless Association projects that 270 million U.S. residents use some sort of mobile device; a recent study conducted by Mobile Recruiting News reported that 95 percent of smartphone owners would “consider job seeking on their mobile.”

2. Apps. Smartphones like Android and the iPhone, not to mention tablet PCs like the iPad, have created a market for apps that’s expected to grow to 17.5 billion by 2012, Charney notes. While 2010 saw the first wave of applications from employers and vendors that target job seekers, Charney predicts 2011 will usher in proprietary career applications that focus on longer-term initiatives such as extending employment brand.

to an associate’s experience with the company,” she says.

Balancing the flexibility needs of today’s candidates while maintaining the service levels for residents, owners and investors is another challenge companies will face, she says.

Q. What are the most important changes you’ve recently seen in the hiring process?

Today’s candidates are more mobile, meaning they have worked more places with less tenure, making reference checks

difficult, Copeland says. In addition, she says, “Companies are more reluctant to provide realistic references on associate performance in order to minimize the possibility of being sued by former employees for defamation of character or to avoid other civil damages.”



Lincoln Property Company has implemented a Manager-In-Training program to fast-track college graduates into management positions within 12 to 18 months.

Jennifer Staciokas
VP of Marketing and Training
Lincoln Property Company
Dallas

Use Caution When Screening Candidates on Social Networking Sites

As social networking grows increasingly pervasive, more employers are utilizing these sites to locate and screen potential employees. Nearly all of the executives interviewed for this article mentioned an increase in their use of social media for recruitment, posting job openings or background and reference checks.

Utilization of social networking sites in the hiring process brings up new legal issues to consider. Publicly available information on social networking websites has seen increasing use by employers seeking to screen potential candidates, says Micah Heilbrun, an Associate in Littler Mendelson’s Houston, Texas, office with extensive experience representing employers in all aspects of labor and employment law.

According to Heilbrun, the legality of making employment and hiring decisions based on candidate background screening is an emerging area of law and the rules and boundaries are not yet firmly established by the courts. For this reason, it is advisable for employers to carefully consider whether to use public information in the hiring process.

“Cautious employers will want to make hiring decisions based on objective, job-related criteria—such as skills, abilities, education and experience—rather than on subjective impressions from publicly accessible websites,” Heilbrun states. “A word of caution: Employers should not attempt to access information on private websites that need a password or approved relationship to be accessed. A New Jersey state court recently ruled that such efforts were unlawful when a restaurant fired two workers after a manager used an employee’s password to access a private chat room where employees had posted comments to a coworker group.

“Although the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has not yet addressed this issue, it is expected that the EEOC will find that employers who review prospective candidates’ personal information on websites—including pictures revealing age, gender, race and disability—are at risk due to the potential for discriminatory hiring decisions. Until the boundaries of this evolving issue are more clearly defined, employers should be careful in deciding whether to use publicly accessible online information about prospective candidates during the hiring process.” —K.B.



Micah Heilbrun

Nearly half (42 percent) of the U.S. companies surveyed in Q4 by the National Association for Business Economics plan to increase hiring in the next six months. In Q1 2010, that percentage was 29 percent.

To improve their hiring process, Bell recently moved to a new personality assessment and expanded their application to gather more information upfront from the applicant. They also decentralized some of their recruiting efforts in order to give more flexibility to their regional offices, moving from an internal recruiting program to an external program.

UDR has modified its recruiting methodology to use a behavior-based interviewing process, Miles-Ley says. "This method has been helpful in identifying core and functional competencies using the applicant's examples of past behaviors. It has assisted our organization with a more solid match of applicant skill sets against required job skills and functions."

The company also is researching videoconference interviewing, Miles-Ley revealed. "Our research indicates that this methodology reduces time to fill and expedites the entire recruitment process, which drives down costs. It will also assist us with our branding efforts, establish a better connection to UDR's workforce,



"We believe we can learn from other industries to improve what we do and how we do it."

**Mary Copeland
Senior VP of Human Resources
Bell Partners Inc.
Greensboro, N.C.**

and enable us to design the product to match our organization's specific needs."

Another large change, Miles-Ley says, is in the expectations of the Millennial Generation, who are recent college graduates in the workforce with some work experience behind them. "Their values, motivations and employment objectives differ significantly from those of previous generations that currently occupy leadership positions within our organization. Although this challenge is not new to the workplace, it appears to be more pronounced today than ever before. If we want to maintain our success or continue to grow our business, we will need to address the specific concerns of the millennial employee population and modify our management techniques and philosophy in order to cater to the needs of this generation."

Q What are some innovative tactics you've used to secure top talent?

Pinnacle leverages LinkedIn information, industry conferences and vendor referrals for sourcing candidates, according to Ed Wolff, Chief Administrative Officer for the Dallas-based real estate management firm, the largest apartment



Pinnacle "courted" its current Vice President of Performance, Michelle Betchner, for six months. Wolff flew to Phoenix with the company's President to persuade her and her family that they were serious in wanting her to join their team.

**Ed Wolff
Chief Administrative Officer
Pinnacle
Dallas**

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manager in the United States. Wolff is known for pulling out all of the stops to get the talent he seeks. He

“courted” the company’s current Vice President of Performance, Michelle Betchner, for six months and then flew to Phoenix with the company’s President to persuade her and her family that they were serious in wanting her to join their team.

In order to attract more qualified candidates, Lincoln Property Company has implemented a Manager-In-Training program to fast-track college graduates into management positions within 12 to 18 months. This program helps Lincoln Property Company to continually improve bench strength by filling leadership roles with up-and-coming employees from internal and external sources, says Jennifer Staciokas, Vice President of Marketing and

Training for the company, which is the fifth largest property manager in the United States. Lincoln also leverages social media, including LinkedIn, Facebook, Craigslist and Twitter.

Robert Dominy, President of Merion Realty Management, is a strong believer in college recruitment and will list positions at select universities as Marketing Representative/Manager in Training. Merion, whose company was founded in 2009 and

now manages 8,500 apartments, pre-screens the resumes of graduating seniors in advance and then informs the school of the names of the students his company would like to meet. The company typically sets up interviews for two consecutive days and has about a 70 percent acceptance rate on its job offers.

“There is some turnover from college grads because this is their first year coming out of school,” Dominy states. “However, from this group you will develop the stars of the future for your company who would otherwise be very hard to find in the labor market.”

Additionally, Dominy always keeps his eyes open for talent. He met the man who eventually became his National Construction Manager while he was standing in an airplane boarding line.

Bell Partners’ Copeland has noticed that less new talent seems to be entering the market. “We tend to rotate the same employees among the companies in our industry,” she says.

As one way to break this cycle, the company always is looking for talent to add to its staff. Managers hand cards to people they come in contact with who have provided superior service, whether from a restaurant, a car rental agency or an airline, to encourage them to seek out a career at Bell. The company also offers a referral bonus to associates who refer employees.

“The most innovative concept is looking outside the industry for similar disciplines that will add value to our teams,” Copeland says. “For example, we just hired our Vice President of Training from Marriott. We believe we can learn from other industries to improve what we do and how we do it.” ■



Dominy met the man who eventually became his National Construction Manager while he was standing in an airplane boarding line.

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