

The Estimator Shortage ~ Is There One? If There Is, What Do You Do?

Observations from ASPE Executive Director Edward Walsh, based on the impact the estimator shortage has had on his day to day activities.

"I used to get a few phone calls or e-mails per month from companies who find ASPE National on the internet and are looking for advice on finding an estimator. In the last two years, that has changed to 3 or 4 phone calls or e-mails *every day* from human resource directors, chief estimators, employment services and owners all asking for advice on how to fill open estimator positions." I have come to see patterns and I thought I might share some observations with you. I don't mind taking the calls or answering the e-mail, thought it now takes up an hour or so of my day. The only thing I ask these callers to do is get their new estimator into one of our local [chapters](#).

At a 2007 McGraw-Hill / ENR seminar I attended in Arlington, VA. a top shelf expert panel discussed the growing worker /management shortage in our industry, it isn't hard to see that estimators fall right into that mix. Baby boomer estimators are starting to retire and fewer candidates are there to step up into those jobs. The boomers are also taking their mentoring talents with them. With all the work there is to bid on these days, the shortage of experienced estimators seems to be having a significant impact. In response to the growing dilemma the society hired an internet employment center vendor to run it's own [job board](#).

Some companies that call ASPE tell us, that their estimating departments are revolving doors with up to 10% turn over *expected* annually. Some companies are literally the "training grounds" for the industry, as estimators come in and work a few years then go take offers from other companies.

There is a subtle tsunami washing over parts of the country where estimators are lured away for higher pay and living conditions by companies hundreds of miles away. I talk with people who run construction companies in the snow belt states who say they are losing people to the sunshine of southern or southwestern states. How can a company compete with great weather, lower cost of living and often better pay?

This is not to say that the construction companies of the booming south and west are not having many of their own issues. As an example, I know an estimator in Las Vegas who keeps getting recruited by employment services and is now in his third job in 3 years, his income has risen 40% and according to him *"I don't know a darn thing more today than when I moved here 2 years ago"*. How can you blame a guy with a family to support? It is all about supply and demand, where in a city like Las Vegas the demand for estimators is huge.

So how are some of the sophisticated companies dealing with this issue? Please see some ideas I have heard below. I'm not the expert, but I can pass along these thoughts.

1. Some companies realize that the person they seek is not likely to be found through a local classified ad. They realize their future estimator may have to be imported from another city, state or region, so they use ads on national websites [[ASPE Career center](#), monster, ENR, AGC career center, NAWIC, etc].
2. Smart companies are involved and make networking a priority. I know of a company in Connecticut where every member of the management team [over 40 people], from the president to the estimators, office staff and all others are in one organization or another. They network at association meetings.
3. Companies are now using employment services that understand and specialize in the construction industry.
4. Some companies often hire [estimating consultants](#) to get them over the humps.
5. The companies most tuned into the problem are doing these things:
 - CREATING ACCESSIBLE TO INFORMATION:
 - They put a link on their homepage for "career opportunities" and they keep it current.
 - One company I have heard of offers "open door" tours to anyone *who even thinks* they might want to work there, no interview required, even if there are no current openings!
 - TREATING PEOPLE LIKE THEY LIKE THEM:
 - They put the "quality of life" issues upfront. I know an estimator who negotiated longer days Monday through Thursday and Fridays off so he could help out with his children's school and teams. The company adjusted and it has worked out.

- Estimators like all professionals want career advancement training, socialization and opportunities to give back to the industry.

- One of the ENR top ten companies I know a bit about, [they have many of their estimators in ASPE], often gives perks like allowance for “professional days”, memberships in organizations like ASPE and time to be active. *The pay off these companies have learned, is loyalty.*

- STRIVING TOWARDS “KEEPING IS BETTER THAN REPLACING”:
 - They are paying better than the market around them and adding to the employment package.

 - Recognizing it is better [and in the long run less expensive] to keep and pay good talent than to constantly replace it makes good sense.

- PUTTING THEM IN CHARGE:
 - They make their people assets and not just worker bees.

 - They put them in management on some level.

- AND MAYBE MOST IMPORTANT ~ THEY NEVER STOP LOOKING:
 - They realize it is better to have many available candidates, rather than trying to fill a hole under duress.