

How To Attract And Retain A Highly Skilled Workforce

Began with a presentation on survey results conducted by the American Association of Petroleum Geologist (AAPG) and followed with a panel discussion on how to attract and retain a skilled workforce.

AAPG's goal of their survey was to assess the workplace climate for women in the petroleum industry and to identify practices that support women and contribute to overall employee satisfaction. From this survey, AAPG wanted to find why women leave the energy industry.

AAPG targeted degreed professional women, in the petroleum industry, in all stages of their career, from data handlers all the way up to senior executives. The survey uncovered how women categorize rewards and challenges in their professional and personal lives and how those challenges and rewards affect their thoughts on staying or leaving their energy industry position.

The most surprising result was that the majority of women feel that rewards are best defined by intellectual contribution and scope of work as opposed to monetary gain. On the other hand, challenges were defined as work life balance issues such as career and family, as well as, work climate issues such as opportunity for advancement and finding female mentors. These challenges reflect the reasons why most women leave the petroleum industry; the lack of advanced opportunities and the lack of industry recognition. But there are more incentives and growing changes in work life balance issues such as more flexible work hours, the ability to work from remote locations, onsite child care facilities, and better compensation for women.

Knowing the challenges, how do we attract and retain women in the petroleum industry? Moderator, Denise Cox, Vice President of Storm Energy, believes that clear communication to potential hires is a must in today's corporate world. "The need for communication," said Denise "to each person is a must. The corporation has a responsibility to communicate to the interviewee what the company wants and what is available for that person."

Marilyn Tears, Systems Manager for ExxonMobil, agrees but dives deeper into the issue. "Along with development," said Marilyn "you have to have this person be a good fit when recruiting people. You don't just look on paper, you look for someone who wants to do the type of work you have. You have to also understand that one size does not fit all. When you start putting people in their positions you have to have a stair step to higher promotions. You need enough flexibility in the system and enough dialogue to develop those individuals that might lack certain skills for higher level opportunities.

This type of communication can already be seen through talent management programs adopted by certain companies. Dina Pyron, Global Director of Human Capital for Ernst & Young, believes that talent management programs are about managing human capital and a tangible resource comprised of people's knowledge, skills, and experiences. "Companies that do this well," said Dina "have a series of steps from day one of recruiting, all the way through development, training, deployment and redeployment."

Companies are devoted to diversity in their workforce but there are still major problems with retention, argued Dr. Christine Williams, Professor of Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. "Companies invest in expensive diversity programs although studies have produced little evidence that these programs even work and maybe even produce backlash," said Christine. "Companies also leave it up to individual managers to make accommodations for individual workers, and it almost makes it a 'luck of the draw' whether you have a sympathetic manager and whether or not you can take advantage

of certain corporate options. And some of those who do take advantage of those opportunities are penalized in such ways as not being given interesting assignments, lack of raises or promotions. "Christine believes it is time for phase 2 of corporate policy so that people taking advantage of accommodation policies will not be penalized for taking them.