

"WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, DO IT YOURSELF"

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publications, plus asking our field personnel to pass along any information they may receive about potential employees. We are also making an effort to recruit recent graduates from technical colleges and trade schools. We are doing a small amount of hiring through personnel recruiting agencies also. So far, recruiting efforts by our field personnel have been the most successful in obtaining good people.

One thing we do not do, and hopefully never will, is pirating employees from other companies. We have found that if you hire someone away from another company with more money or a high title, it won't be long until someone hires him away from you. We must receive an application or a resume from a prospective employee or we will not even interview him. We also look very hard at his reasons for leaving his last company, how long he has worked for each company in the past and we ask him directly why he feels he would like to work for ATC.

An update on what one company is doing to further the education of their technical employees. Covers the types of training and material used, as well as providing a look at future plans.

Last year at the NCTA Convention in New Orleans, we discussed some of the problems associated with finding qualified technical personnel. It seemed that everyone had the same problem, but no one was too sure what the answers were.

A year later, the problem still exists. It may even be a little worse, due to the massive construction boom that is now underway. However, at least a few of the operating companies feel that they are starting to move in the right direction. For this paper, I interviewed many people from several companies to get their input, and to find out what they were doing. Most of all, I wanted to find out if there really were any solutions to the technician shortage.

A.T.C., and at least three other MSO's, feel that they are finally moving in the right direction. Of course, being deeply involved in ATC's effort, I am confident that our way will work. Our theory has become the subject of this talk. "WHEN ALL ELSE FAILS, DO IT YOURSELF."

I would like to discuss some of the things that we are doing, or are planning to do very soon.

- 1.) Active recruiting. This primarily encompasses advertising in all the trade

- 2.) Higher wages, I think that this one area that has needed revision for a long time. I won't go into details, but I can safely say that technical salaries have increased by a significant amount. It's a seller's market right now and we are the buyers. Our top people today are getting salaries that were unheard of just a very few years ago. But, if you don't pay decent salaries, a good technician can go a few miles down the road and find another job, usually at a better salary.
- 3.) Benefits. Neither ATC, nor any other company that I've contacted, have significantly changed their basic employee benefits in the last year. In most of the companies, benefits offered are the same package as all other companies offer. We don't feel that benefits play an important part as long as you have the basic health, vacation, sick days, etc.
- 4.) Education. This is an area that has been and still is playing a major part in our present future plans. We have

done research into education for the last three years and have finally come up with a package that we feel will take care of 90% of our needs for years to come. I'd like to give you a little background on our previous educational efforts prior to getting into our present operation.

ATC has been an advocate of education and training for a number of years. An educational assistance policy was established to help pay for the costs. The policy was: reimbursement of 50% of the costs of any job-related course within 6 months after course completion and the final 50% after another 6 months. The time delay was intended to induce employees to stay with the company for at least one year after completing a course. If they didn't stay, they did not get full reimbursement. Needless to say, some of them stayed and some didn't. About the same percentage stayed whether they had schooling or not. The delayed reimbursement had the undesired effect of diminishing the numbers of people who took expensive courses. They couldn't afford to pay all the costs and then not get their money back for a year or two. This policy was revised and updated within the last year to our present policy.

Our present policy is: You select the job-related course and we buy it. 50% of the cost will be divided by the number of pay periods in one year. Let me give you an example: A course is bought which costs us \$800.00. We pay the \$800.00 and then take 50% of that amount (\$400.00) and divide it by the number of pay periods per year, usually 26, which gives us \$15.38. Then, \$15.38 is deducted from each of the employee's pay checks until he either completes the course (with a passing grade) or until \$400.00 is paid off. When the employee passes the course, deductions stop immediately. All money paid in by the employee is then refunded to him after six months. Since this policy has been in effect, the numbers of employees enrolled in courses has increased by almost 50%.

Since we still didn't feel that this was the total answer, we continued looking into other ways to improve the overall education of our employees.

The next step taken was the establishment of an installer school in one of our Florida systems. Why Florida? We had facilities available, with minor (\$18,000) expenditures for material, and the Regional Engineer was an excellent teacher. We wrote all our own material, did all the drawings, made slides, etc., etc.,

The first class, starting March 26, 1979, consisted of 12 recently hired people and 14 installation supervisors. None of the new hires had any climbing or cable experience. The supervisors were included so that they would be aware of what we were teaching and how installs were to be done. I have a quantity of copies of the outlines of this course with me. If you are interested, I'll give you a copy when we are through here.

This first series of classes consisted of two weeks per class, with from 16 to 20 employees in each class. When the employees left class and returned to their systems, they were fully qualified installers. Even those who had never climbed a pole or seen a cable drop could go out and make installs with the rest of the crews. Production was not quite up to that of the experienced people, about 75-80%, but the work they do is as good (or better in many cases) than that of the people who had just been trained "on the job."

We feel that this training program is an unqualified success. It is expensive, but we feel that it is money well spent. One reason for the expense is that we fly our people into Florida, pay their room and board and salary. If you exclude these costs, you are only taking about a cost of \$180. to \$200. per student/per class. It would cost you that much to recruit an experienced installer, and his salary would be quite a bit higher than we pay our trainees to start.

We still don't feel that this is all we want to do in education. We have now created a Department of Technical Training within ATC with a full time manager, instructors and clerical staff. Some of the things we are doing, or plan to do in the near future are as follows:

- a. Create specialized classes so that each one of our technical people can attend at least two weeks of classes per year. The techs will be able to choose the topics which are of greatest interest to them. Some topics which we are now looking into are:
 1. Repair, alignment and maintenance of headend equipment.
 2. Microwave theory and practise.
 3. System Design.
 4. Alphanumeric theory, repair and maintenance.
 5. Video waveforms. Theory and practical application.
 6. Data transmission via cable systems.And many more.
- b. Prepare training guides for use by our field personnel for in-system training.
- c. Prepare training taps in basic electronics for use by our field personnel.
- d. Compile a book on CATV Engineering.
- e. Write correspondence courses for in-house home study. These will be issued at no cost to qualified employees who request them. We presently plan six courses, ranging from basic CATV theory through advanced CATV engineering.
- f. Continue the field seminars. We presently conduct one 3 day seminar per month/per region. Since we have 11 regions, this

allows us to go to the field and talk to the technicians in each region once each year. We also have all our regional and large system engineers come to Denver once each year for a high level engineering seminar.

- f. Train Construction Linemen for our own construction crews.

This probably sounds like a very ambitious and costly undertaking. You are right - it definitely is, on both counts. However, ATC management is not noted for going off on wild-eyed schemes unless they are sure that the schemes will work and will pay off. We are sure on this.

If for some reason it should not work out after all the time and money we've put into it, at least we had guts enough to try and we care enough about our employees to want to help them. We tried to do it ourselves.

One last thing - if it doesn't work out, I'd like to have all your names and addresses so I can send out my resume quickly. I'm sure I'll need another job in a hurry.

Thank you.