Hiring, Training and maintaining your staff

– *Estimators, project managers, shop foremen, operations managers, Installers*

Stop the "revolving door" – maintain good employee relations

By Sandra Henson

People Logic Software Corp.

Human Resources it is an ongoing problem – finding, training and retaining qualified employees. Woodworking companies are known for the "revolving door". New staff comes in and leaves through the revolving doors as quickly as they arrived. Many companies cease to grow because of a shortage of trained staff. Equipment that eliminates manpower offers a partial solution to this problem. But downsizing is not always the right answer. In order to see continued growth companies are still hiring but would like a solution to the revolving door. Many shop owners are stuck in a loop of their own creation – they do everything from estimating, sales, preparing cut lists, scheduling the shop labor, scheduling delivery and co-ordinating on site installation. Finding a replacement in any of these areas is not always easy. *The biggest problem is relinquishing responsibility to someone else and trusting him or her to do the job.* The simplest solution is to implement systems and structures for new employees to fit into with checks and balances built in. Too often the simple solution may be the most

difficult as shop owners tend to run on instinct and gut reactions and rely heavily on past experiences.

This is the exact place that Island Precision Cabinets, an architectural millwork shop, found themselves in. They certainly needed to expand and this required implementing a system and structure so new employees could learn the ways of the company. Island Precision developed take off™ a software program which enabled them to train estimators on a system that used information the company could rely on and was easy to run analyses on. The software contained all of the numbers and assumptions that the owner used when estimating; consequently he had a system and numbers that he could trust. With the implementation of this software the owner of the company now had the time to devote his attention to other areas of concern by relieving himself of some of the more mundane and repetitive tasks that estimating required. He was able to run analyses, review the estimate and make any corrections and adjustments before tendering the bid. This was a major breakthrough he now had an estimate he could trust and a valued employee that was well trained.

It became apparent that the flow of information was the most critical component in running the business. If the incorrect information reached the shop floor the product was built incorrectly. If wrong assumptions were made in purchasing, wrong material or incorrect amounts ordered were too much or too little with inventory arriving too early or too late, all of which translated into costly errors. If the

incorrect information filtered through to the job site again costly mistakes were made and time is lost making things right.

Reduce Human error

The challenges now became obvious. Solve the flow through of information. Reduce human error by eliminating the duplication of information by different people in each department of the manufacturing chain. Once a job has been awarded it is important that the information, complete with all assumptions, can travel directly from the estimate through to the purchasing department, operations manager, and installation co-ordinator. With everyone working from the same information the chances of error are greatly reduced. By providing staff members with accurate reports and information, a system and method for training has been established and can be easily overseen and monitored by immediate supervisors. Another step in the chain of events that helped streamline the company's operations, improve company morale and retain well-trained employees, was to create a link from the estimate that would directly download the information to the machinery on the shop floor. The key again was to eliminate the chance of human error. Whenever information and data gets re-entered you have created an opportunity for errors. By eliminating this step – time is saved which always equates to dollars but more importantly an opportunity for human error has been eliminated.

By providing your staff with good quality tools you have taken the first step in creating and maintaining valuable employees. You will find that morale increases, as staff understands the systems have been put in place to help them avoid errors. They will see immediately that simple office tasks and duties are no longer fraught with land mines they may accidentally ignite and cost them their jobs. The onus is on the employer to create a work atmosphere that nurtures good employee relations, provides training, and in the long run retains valuable employees.

For Brian Timothy, President of Island Precision Cabinets, he personally took on the challenge to solve these deficiencies. He set out to eliminate the duplication of information by individuals in each department. Along with his partner Axel Wagner they engineered a software system that provided a tool which would carry all of the information that goes along with a project starting from the original estimate through to installation and completion. With takeoff™ estimating and project management software Brian has provided his staff with the tools to do the job better and has been able to run his architectural millwork shop more efficiently and profitably.