



RECRUITMENT IN CONSTRUCTION

We talk to Kathryn Hayter, managing director of recruitment firm K Hayter Associates, which specialises in the housebuilding, residential development and private rented sector (PRS) for roles across England.

Please tell us a little about yourself and your role.

I have personally worked in the sector for over 13 years and started KHA in the recession back in 2009 – I think everyone thought I was a little bit mad.

I have a very varied role. This includes still being heavily involved in recruitment assignments as well as managing the team, developing the strategic side of the business and coaching both clients and individuals. I personally have a certificate in counselling and am currently in the process of becoming qualified as a transformational coach, which (I think!) helps us stand out from the rest.

What shape is recruitment in the housebuilding industry in? Is the skills shortage wide-ranging?

The market is currently very buoyant and there is a serious skills shortage across all disciplines but especially at junior to middle management level, the industry is very top heavy with many being promoted quickly to try and retain staff. We are conducting more headhunts than ever – at all levels, as opposed to just board level – and adopting new ways of working in order to help clients tackle this.

Are there roles and/or locations that you are finding particularly popular right now?

Strategic land has recently become very 'sexy', which is the pretty much the opposite of how it was viewed 10 years ago. With the increase of land promoters as well as housebuilders focusing more on strategic land, it has inevitably resulted in many businesses looking to recruit for strategic land personnel.

Which roles are crying out for applicants with the necessary skills/qualifications?

We are finding that companies are recruiting across disciplines at the moment, with the West Midlands, East Anglia and Bristol areas seeing a period of

rapid expansion. We are currently working with a number of businesses in these areas to help them implement new brands, new regions and new teams.

Land, engineering, surveying and construction are probably the most challenging. Qualifications aren't really the issue as the sector isn't so concerned with those (unless perhaps you are a planner): it has always been a person-driven/experience-led industry, but we are certainly lacking in enough skills in these areas. We have advised many of our clients to 'think outside of the box' when recruiting, for example, hiring from consultancy or agency side and looking at individuals with transferable skills. This so far has been really successful for both us and them.

Do employers and candidates really understand what the other is looking for and how to provide it?

I would say it completely depends on the particular employer and individual. Communication is obviously key, most clients have an idea of what they are looking for but this can change as a search progresses, dependent upon who you find and what stage the business is at, for example, if it is an established or new region. How the recruitment process is carried out is vital, if a third party (recruitment consultancy) is involved, then it is imperative that they are honest about the role. There are many stories out there that I am sure most readers would have heard about or experienced where recruiters are 'bending' the truth to gain interest. We have always adopted a very honest, straight-talking approach so both parties know exactly what they are getting.

Do you see a big difference between how large housebuilders and SMEs approach recruitment, training and staff retention?

I personally feel it is more to do with the business

itself and the attitudes of the CEO and senior management team, as opposed to the size of the business. There are some great companies out there who have really strong values and ethics, who do what they say they are going to do and try to look after their people. I don't mean just financially – for most individuals it isn't just about this – it's about being understood, recognised and supported.

However, there are a number of businesses out there who don't hold similar values and don't seem to be concerned with looking after their people or rewarding them. One of my main aims with the business has been that we align ourselves with companies who share similar values as we do, who we can trust and who we know will treat the people we introduce fairly.

Could more be done to promote housebuilding as a positive career choice?

We could definitely do more as an industry, there needs to be much more awareness within schools and we need to change the perception of the sector. Many people (including school children and their parents) don't know about the opportunities that are available within housebuilding, they don't even know housebuilders have regional offices, let alone the great careers that can be attained.

Many housebuilders are doing their own thing to promote their own business and the industry, which is great; however, I believe we need to come together as a collective to tackle this, otherwise we will be saying the same thing for years to come.

As many of our clients agree, we also need to work harder to attract more women, the industry is shouting out for a more balanced mix within their teams. However, some organisations within the sector are still quite traditional and have a 'boys club' mentality; if we are going to attract more women and retain them, especially at a senior level, then I believe this needs to change.