

Portrait of the Perfect Candidate

BY PAUL POMPEO

As IESNA enters its second century, let's look into our crystal ball and try to envision the make-up of the "perfect" job candidate within the lighting industry.

"The ideal candidates require a combination of strong technical capabilities and superior 'soft' skills, including high creativity, excellent project management skills and solid business acumen," says Michelle Barbarone, human resources manager for Advance. "Successful candidates also need to demonstrate an ability to think beyond the product, market or industry at hand...almost looking at their market from the 'outside in' rather than from the 'inside out.'"

Larry Miller, senior vice president of human resources with Acuity Brands Lighting, says he looks "for creativity, a bias toward risk-taking and work/life balance." Miller adds, "The paradigms have changed. Top employees must be individually resourceful *and* know how to function on teams. They must have intuitive judgment, but also be fact-based decision makers. They never maintain the status quo, but seek continuous improvement. They work 'on' the business, not 'in' the business."

With that as a framework, let's look at some of the ingredients in

our recipe for the perfect candidate of the future.

EDUCATION

Education is more than just classroom learning and degrees, say several industry veterans. "Our business is very technical and requires individuals who can 'think on their feet,'" says Jon Memsic, director of national accounts and regional sales vice president for Holophane. "They need the ability and desire to learn new computer programs, as well as complete complex lighting design layouts for the consulting engineers."

Terry Fraser, general manager with Thomas Lighting, adds that his company "is looking for candidates

Chris Tedesco of Prisma Architectural Lighting adds that "receiving technical training on topics such as ASHRAE/IESNA 90.1, Title 24, and LEED standards and qualifications, as well as understanding the newest emerging sources and optical technologies will be extremely important." Finally, Paresch Shah, a respected professional in the lighting design community, stresses the importance of the LC. "Lighting professional certification will be a great plus."

LIGHTING DESIGN

Design, along with engineering, is really the straw that stirs the drink in the lighting industry. Not surprisingly, experts say the skill set must blend the twin pillars of light-

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with a college degree and a background that includes participation in extra-curricular activities that exhibit leadership and public speaking competencies. I think the biggest issue facing candidates today is desire for continuing education. We're not looking to hire people who think that now that they've completed their formal education, they can forget about further educational pursuits. We look for candidates that want to increase their formal education, whether through an extended major, or an M.B.A., as well as striving for industry related credentials."

ing—art and science. Jim Benya, principal with Benya Design, argues that "candidates must combine a practical education in lighting technology, computer methods, design and design production skills, and develop a grounding philosophy in design approach. To date, our higher education programs lack the ability to teach design—something we must learn to do to generate the candidates we need [for the future]."

David Orgish, senior lighting designer with Peter & Myer Design Collaborative, says aspiring designers should be equally facile in dealing with

both technical and creative issues. "Lighting design has changed dramatically in the past 15 years. As lighting design has gained prominence as a specialty, the focus of many entry-level candidates has shifted toward technical competence. This has led, somewhat indirectly, to a decrease in the creative or compositionally driven considerations that are inherent in a successful lighting design project. In that regard, the perfect candidate would be someone who not only possesses the technical skills to work with the fundamentals of light, but someone who possesses the creative abilities to compose with the medium in a visually dynamic way."

John Nadon, business unit brand manager with Zumtobel Staff Lighting Inc., discusses a personal career path that could serve as a model for other designers. "I am spoiled in that I got the best start possible in design, and I look for a similar background in designers. I studied theater design and specialized in lighting design based on nothing more than my own interest. I loved playing with light, and the more I played the more I learned. I realized off-the-shelf products wouldn't do everything I needed. I got to hand-make lighting fixtures to solve lighting problems. I worked also during summers for an electrical contractor."

Nadon recommends that designers embrace the idea of sales. "While I loved the design part, doing sales as well as design lets you see the practical issues that architects, interior designers and contractors face. You see that just thinking in lighting design terms is simply not enough."

While technical skill and artistic flair are paramount, Shah says designers shouldn't underestimate the importance of a global network of personal contacts. "Design is now more of an international process than it has ever been. The 'skunk works' concept still applies, but now it is worldwide! A designer needs to have national and international

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sources in terms of contacts—particularly suppliers and vendors of components used for the design of a product.”

LIGHTING SYSTEMS

One growth area in the industry has been lighting systems, as products get integrated and automation becomes a more frequent part of a lighting (and building) package. Over the last decade, new technology has enabled the development of these “smart” products. Jim Sekinger, director of business development, digital systems for Advance, feels this has “increasingly required end users to consider the entire system in place rather than just its components (e.g., ballasts, lamps, fixtures, controls, etc). As the market continues to embrace and drive such initiatives as LEED, smart buildings and other comprehensive approaches to energy efficiency and sustainability, company representatives will need to be knowledgeable in systems, as well as in their own specific product lines.”

PASSION

E.M. Forster once said, “One person with passion is better than 40 people merely interested.” Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “Enthusiasm is one of the most powerful engines of success. When you do a thing, do it with all your might. Put your whole soul into it. Stamp it with your own personality. Be active, be energetic and faithful, and you will accomplish your object. Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.”

The last ingredient in our recipe for the perfect lighting candidate of the future may seem like an intan-

gible, but passion is a critical characteristic, according to many industry leaders. “I am not big on credentials but rather on individuals who are passionate about lighting and understand the value that good lighting brings to everyone’s life,” says Larry Powers, president/CEO of Genlyte Group. “We need people who want to learn all there is to learn about good lighting and then be able to teach and sell what they know to others. Our industry has become too focused on price and we need to focus more on quality and innovation. If we can find individuals who are enthusiastic about what they do they will generally be successful.”

Prisma’s Tedesco says he “recently had a conversation with a CEO of a well known European lighting manufacturer. His recipe for success is, ‘In business, as in life, one must have passion, patience and perseverance when striving for their goals.’ He felt that success is inevitable—it’s only a matter of time. I thought about this for a moment and agreed completely. Of the three ingredients, the first, passion, is probably the most important—and valuable—for employer and employee, alike. This passion should be held for one’s organization, for the product and service that this organization delivers, and most importantly for the specific responsibility that the individual is charged with. In sales, this is the ‘aura’ left behind long after a salesperson leaves a client’s office; it is the lingering impression of the individual as well as the product and organization that he or she represents.”

The question is, how do you apply passion to what you are doing right

now? If you’re in a position in lighting where you don’t feel that passion, seek a different position within your company. If there is nothing within your company that fires that enthusiasm in you, then change companies. If you cannot find it in lighting, then change industries. The superior candidates of the future will possess a genuine enthusiasm—not a pseudo “rah-rah” attitude but a true passion—for what they do. In the years ahead, the axiom “successful people do what they love” will never be more true.



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