

# Smart Strategies to Address Distribution Center HR Recruiting Challenges

A strong economy is good for business, but it strains your ability to find and retain quality candidates. In the manufacturing and distribution sector, employers are facing ever-growing demand and labor shortages. Now is the time to implement proactive strategies for finding qualified talent and optimizing resources.

## Start with the Right People

Companies tend to place a lot of emphasis on associates handling the physical challenges of working in a production or distribution center. But hard skills, such as lifting 50 lbs. or operating a forklift, are just the beginning. These facilities are high-pressure environments that require strong communicators and problem solvers. The best associates couple soft skills with their physical ability.

A single error can have a major impact on production. One mechanical mistake can lead to a shutdown that delays order times. It's important to have associates who can thrive under that pressure.

The strongest associates adapt to changes in demand, whether seasonal or spurred on by national economic turns. They need to be able to ride the waves of overtime and downtime in the production and distribution environment.

## Make It Easy for Them to Apply

Glassdoor studied 12 million users and found that 56% of workers with a high school education use mobile phones to search for jobs. The transportation, logistics, and retail sectors were the second and third most common industries to attract mobile job seekers.

But mobile applicants are also the most likely to have trouble with the application process. They complete their applications 53% less often than desktop users.

Not only does that reduce the number of applicants, it slows down the candidate evaluation process. A mobile-friendly applicant tracking system (ATS) allows you to capture their attention quickly, makes applying simple, and enables you to expedite the evaluation process.

## Take a Proactive Approach to Finding Talent

In this economy, the best associates may not find their way to your job listing. Passive sourcing, where you seek out candidates not currently looking for jobs, can give you an edge. This is where an outsourced facility partner can be extremely valuable. Their recruiters can work to build a database of qualified candidates who specifically perform distribution center duties, allowing you to dedicate recruiters to roles more critical to your core business.

Another proactive approach is to partner with high schools or programs that target young people who aren't pursuing a college education. They can be led into apprenticeships, providing a career path they may not have considered.

## Create an Experience that Makes Them Want to Stay

Once you have the right associates, you need to keep them. Turnover in this sector is high, as nearly one-third of companies reported warehouse employee churn between 10% and 25%, according to ARC Advisory Group. This is where a strong company culture focused on employee engagement and development can make all the difference.

In these facilities, where the work is repetitive, it's easy for associates to disconnect from their work's purpose. It takes consistent effort to keep them engaged, and that must be

embedded in your culture. Gallup found that companies that invest in employee development are twice as likely to retain their associates.

One way to do that is with a strong feedback and evaluation process. Start by setting and communicating realistic performance goals. Next, communicate associates' progress on those goals on a regular basis. Visual displays and daily stand-up meetings can provide insight into their progress and eliminate surprises when reviews roll around.



## Feedback Goes Both Ways

There's no point in hiring associates who are problem solvers if you won't let them solve problems. The feedback process should be mutual, as the strategies and ideas you implement may not play out as you imagine.

Associates working on the floor can keep you in touch with reality and offer solutions to issues they experience that management may not think of on their own. If they feel heard, they're more likely to be engaged.

## Stay Connected through Internal Communications

Another key component of a thriving culture is internal communications. With round-the-clock schedules that fluctuate based on demand, production and distribution associates can feel disconnected from the larger organization. Technology offers a way to keep them connected no matter where they are.

An employee intranet that acts as a central location for company news, employee recognition, and important documents makes it easy for them to stay connected. Considering the popularity of smartphones, and the fact that lower income workers are less likely to have broadband internet access at home, a mobile-friendly intranet site will increase the success of your internal communications efforts.

## Provide a Path for Growth

If an employee feels capped in their growth, they're more likely to leave. It's important to provide a path for advancement so that today's janitor can rise up to be a supervisor, district manager, or salesperson. This is why feedback and performance evaluation are so critical. Give associates an opportunity to shine and be recognized, and they'll be more likely to stay with the company and refer people they know.

## Unique Strategies to Maximize Current Resources

There are several unique strategies to get more value from associates and ride the waves of change that come with the market. Expand your labor pool to include those who may only be interested in part-time work. They can help fill gaps when demand fluctuates.

Cross-training and cross-utilization also enables flexibility, as an associate who is bundling cardboard boxes today can be changing light bulbs tomorrow. This is a hallmark strategy used in outsourced facility services.

While there are several strategies you can implement to minimize the impact of a labor shortage on your business, consider relying on an experienced vendor that understands the most effective practices to help you meet customer demand regardless of the economy's state.



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