

## **Aquaterra Energy Focuses Attention on Engagement and Retention**

We live in a 'mobile world' where jobs are no longer viewed as a life-long commitment and portfolio careers are becoming a norm. Yet, for companies like offshore engineering solutions provider Aquaterra Energy, the long-term commitment of the skilled engineers in its team is of paramount importance.

Skills shortages, particularly in the engineering industry, have resulted in a highly competitive recruitment market, where companies invest heavily in attracting top graduates. For companies throughout the supply chain, maximising this investment is not just about identifying and securing engineers with the right qualifications and skills, it is about finding people who will fit the culture and team, and ensuring that they remain committed and engaged for the long-term.

Steve Way, HR Manager at Aquaterra Energy, said: "Like all companies in the oil and gas industry we are continually investing in our recruitment processes. This includes proactively marketing opportunities internally, as well as externally, to attract top engineers.

"Recruitment through referrals from our own staff can often be more effective than using external agencies. This is because with each recommendation comes an element of responsibility for that referral and both parties – the referrer and the referee, feel some obligation towards each other and the company. So we now ensure that all vacancies are promoted internally and employees are incentivised to recommend candidates from within their own circles of family, friends and peers."

Cultural fit is a critical element of Aquaterra Energy's candidate selection process and Way believes that ensuring new recruits have the personality traits and work ethic to match the company's culture also helps to ensure they will stay with the company for the long-term.

Way continued: "While our company continues to grow at a significant rate, we have retained our intimate company culture and approach, enabling us to

offer tailored training and development, with personalised career progression, which will suit the aspirations of many engineers and ensure that they are able to enjoy making a significant contribution to the company's long-term future.

“So, in our recruitment process we look beyond skills, hands-on experience and achievements to assess a candidate's personality traits, work ethic and cultural fit. To help us find individuals who will truly complement the people within our team, and enhance the already multicultural environment we work in, we have created a unique personality profiling model, based on the personalities within the existing team.”

However, according to Way, finding the right candidates isn't enough and, when skills are in short supply, an equally important part of the company's growth strategy is the proactive retention of talented engineers once they are on-board.

Way said: “All too often companies throughout the energy supply chain are recruiting and training up graduates, only to have them leave and join other companies after a few years. This can be damaging for business. While the salaries and packages we offer are competitive, we need to be offering individuals far more if we are to retain their commitment. So, in the same way that we strive to always offer our clients the very best service, we must also work to deliver the very best environment and rewards for our staff.

“To this end, we have devised a proactive retention strategy which hinges on Aquaterra Energy's traditional values, where every member of staff is treated equally and receives a range of benefits. A strong team culture underpins everything we do and manifests itself in a range of social activities, charitable and community work, company events and the sharing, acknowledgement and rewarding of success. It's amazing how powerful a well timed and sincerely meant “Thank you” or “Well done” can be when received from your line manager, or their boss! That's the culture we try to encourage. It is often the small things the company does that staff members appreciate and remember.”

Since joining the company in 2013, Way has started a new staff forum to enable all employees to have a say in the way the company operates. From the very first forum gathering came a staff proposal relating to flexible working and the company's standard working hours, which was put to the company's

board and, after careful consideration of the implications, was approved and implemented.

Way commented: “This was a clear demonstration of the company’s ethos and willingness to listen to its employees. We want this to be a place where people enjoy working for the long-term, so we need to give them a voice, and the forum achieves this.”

Way believes that in engineering businesses, like Aquaterra Energy, it is important to recognise that not every engineer wants to be a leader or manager of other engineers. He said: “Many of the most talented engineers have a passion for engineering and prefer to focus on their specific area of expertise, working as part of a team but not responsible for the management of others.

“On top of all this it is important, of course, to provide a balance; work needs to be interesting and there must be opportunities for continual learning and development of new ideas and challenges to offset the inevitability of more mundane elements of daily responsibilities.”

Finally, Way believes that effective exit interviews can be a useful source of information and can help to inform future retention strategies.

He concluded: “At Aquaterra Energy the really interesting thing has been that exit interviews don’t bear as much fruit as they have for other companies where I’ve worked. Almost without exception, on the few occasions when someone has left the company, it has been for genuine personal reasons, and they have expressed a sincere desire to return if and when circumstances change.

“It is true to say that while we are sad when people leave the company, we value the Aquaterra Energy’s ‘alumni network’ as a rich vein for future referrals and recruitment. The network contains company advocates and ambassadors with whom we will stay in touch.”