

Last Word



Starting New with a Career

BY PAUL CANTRELL

In many conversations with new tradesmen in the field, I've come to learn the challenges they see being new to the industry. Employers hire new personnel with a particular need in mind. The problem is they typically fail to promote those employees and discouraged employees leave the trade outright. I've come to realize that both employers and employees fail to communicate their expectations. Mainly, employers fail to present a career path that fulfills both parties' expectations.

A career is a lifetime of skill development along with a salary that supports an employee through retirement. A job is just a set task at a set rate of pay. Employers can no longer hire someone with only one position or job in mind. They must hire them with the expectation to employ them for the duration of their career. This starts at evaluating their talent, discussing their expectations, and explaining what the tradesman needs to do to advance within their company.

Many times, a greenhorn expects a high hourly rate because he heard that a tech can make \$40+/hour. His hourly rate is typically set when he starts and then discussed once more at 90 days. But then they typically go many months without another conversation about their future. The worst part is that management has not told him what his future earnings or job roles could even be. The result: the greenhorn is unable to see past the next pay period.

If you talk with a tradesman who has been on the job for only six months, you will often discover the only conversation that person has had with management about his future is the job location for next week. A new employee is frequently too shy to start a conversation with management about advancement opportunities. Management needs to be aware that it is encouraging if you let a tradesman know where he stands with his employment. And for his part, the tradesman needs to ask about how his skills stack up, to seek advice from others, and to take charge of the progress of his own career.

There should be numerous conversations with all career tradesmen throughout the year. Owners and managers know there is always high demand for skilled personnel. Starting new hires off correctly with training and established expectations is imperative to retain people. The tradesmen should always know their standing with the company—a good or bad review should never be a surprise. Self-improvement should always be encouraged. Ways to do this would be to offer promotions after certain achievements have been made. If the tradesman takes an online class for a particular skill set, then proceeds to demonstrate advanced troubleshooting skills, he should

be rewarded. Let the tradesmen know where to access the resources to better their skills.

An expectation of clarity does not fall solely on management. The tradesman should express his concerns and goals. If he expects to make \$40/hour, he should ask what skills he needs to develop. He should also share his achievements to make sure that his employer is aware of them.

That said, the employer should be clear and honest about the tradesmen's progress. Too many times an employee becomes disgruntled and looks for another job because he feels he was being "led on." Management makes empty promises about future raises that never happen as a way to end a bad conversation. Those promises should never have been made in the first place. Yes, it's awkward to discuss poor performance. But it is also harder to develop a career than a job. In the end, poor performance can only be blamed on the people who are responsible for developing their team. Without clear and consistent communication, tradesmen are unable to know how their performance is rated.

Failure to communicate will only result in a never-ending cycle of high turnover and profit loss. Let's make continued conversations with developing tradesmen the norm.

Paul Cantrell is a service technician originally from northern Alabama who now calls northeast Florida home. He started as an electrician as a teenager and now has 19 years of experience as a controls electrician and refrigeration technician. His passion is helping bring the next generation into the trades and he enjoys working with and training new technicians. He may be reached at cantrell5564@icloud.com. 📧

▶ TROUBLESHOOTING ANSWER

This diagnosis comes to us from real readings taken by our training manager Allen Reed.

Because the system is a TXV, many would jump to add refrigerant to increase the subcooling. In this case, the superheat is below 5°F at the outdoor unit, which signifies that the metering device is overfeeding. While the system may require a charge adjustment, the first step would be to inspect the TXV and, in this case, it was loose and uninsulated, resulting in low superheat and subcooling. Once the bulb is properly fastened to the suction line and insulated, the superheat and the subcooling came up to their proper levels.