

Smart Hiring Will Help You Grow

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Believe it or not, the industry is hiring again! It has been a tough few years, but as the best companies in each market see growth, many are looking to build their workforce.

If you are thinking about hiring an electronic systems technician (EST) or two, you are faced with a choice: bring in someone with experience (likely from another company), or hire an entry-level person and train them to your policies and standards.

Many owners have found that a technician with experience also brings some “baggage” as well in the form of bad habits, i.e. doing things “the way we used to do it.” On the other hand, a newbie, even if they are smart and motivated, requires months of fundamental training – following another tech around, and learning the terminology and techniques before they can work on their own.

There is a better way. What if you could identify an applicant with the right attitude and soft skills and know they have mastered the fundamentals already? What if you knew they were ready to start being a productive technician right away while continuing to learn and advance within your company guidelines?

As you may know, over the last couple years the [ESPA](#) program has grown and matured and has found its way into several tech schools and community colleges around the country. What is ESPA? It is an entry-level EST training and certification program launched cooperatively by CEDIA, NSCA and CEA to build a job-ready entry-level workforce for the low-voltage systems industry.

If you are not familiar with ESPA, you should look into it further. If a young person (or career changer) comes to you with this certification you will know they have a solid understanding of the low-voltage basics in five domains: Tools, Wiring Practices, Jobsite Safety Codes and Standards, Basic Electricity and Construction Methods. The exam was

built by a strong working group of industry professionals. Passing this test really does mean the individual has a practical foundation on which to build a career.

A good place to start is to recommend this credential for new employees. We are all familiar with the success of CompTIA's A+ when employers started requiring it. That same recommendation from employers can help make ESPA the de facto credential to get into our industry.

If you have a school nearby that is teaching to the ESPA certification, you will have a great pool of potential new hires to choose from. If not, anyone with internet access can take the self-paced online training and prepare for the exam, which is delivered in a few hundred proctored locations, just like exams from CEDIA, CompTIA and other certification bodies. So if a candidate seems like the right person but lacks the fundamentals, the ESPA program is the perfect way for them to come to work prepared.

Here's another good idea to strengthen your workforce: Hire someone who is returning from active duty in America's military. There will be nearly 100,000 of them, and they bring a sense of duty and a disciplined mindset. Besides, it's the right thing to do!

The ESPA exam has been approved for GI Bill reimbursement, which means a veteran can take the test and then have that expense covered. It would be hard to imagine a better new hire than an ambitious veteran with some computer skills and the ESPA certification under their belt. ESPA is establishing a presence among several nationwide programs focused on employment for returning vets, and we would love to have our members recognize and embrace this concept.

Bottom line: If you are looking for entry-level ESTs, you should consider asking for the ESPA certification to demonstrate that they have a solid knowledge of the fundamentals. You can learn more about ESPA, its mission, and certification at www.espa.org.

About Jeff Gardner

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