

Developing Your Inspector Workforce:

5 Key Strategies to Elevate Your Safety, Environmental and Quality Culture

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Raising the level of performance among inspectors is critical throughout our industry. Improving your inspector performance, safety culture, environmental culture, and quality culture is likely a critical piece of your company's strategy because it's good for business.

It's further necessitated by aging pipelines resulting in large replacement projects and regulatory oversight increases that result in broader demands for documentable, verifiable field records and degrees of separation observation data. Further, as competition for talent increases, your commitment to safety, the environment and quality is important to retention, loyalty, and talent acquisition.

A SURVEY OF THE UTILITY INDUSTRY

In 2019, our firm conducted an industry survey among twenty-five utility companies with the help of the American Gas Association. The focus of our survey was on the inspection workforce in these companies. We sought to understand what the industry needed, how they were currently managing inspection workforce needs, and what improvements they needed to see.

What we found was:

- Capacity, capabilities, and training are the biggest needs in the industry as it relates to inspection workforce (Figure 1);
- Companies are averaging 20 per cent replacement (Figure 2), and an increased need of 25 per cent (Figure 3) over the next two years, resulting in a total need of 45 per cent of their staffing volume over the next two years; and,
- The most common retention strategies include year-round work, OT, and PTO (Figure 4).

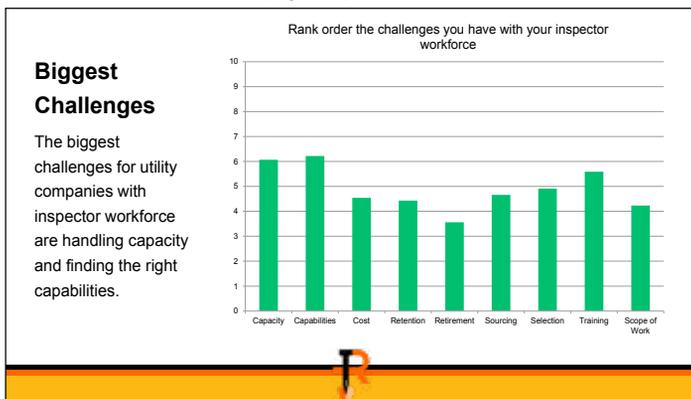


Figure 1. Capacity and capabilities were the top-ranked challenges with managing inspector workforce

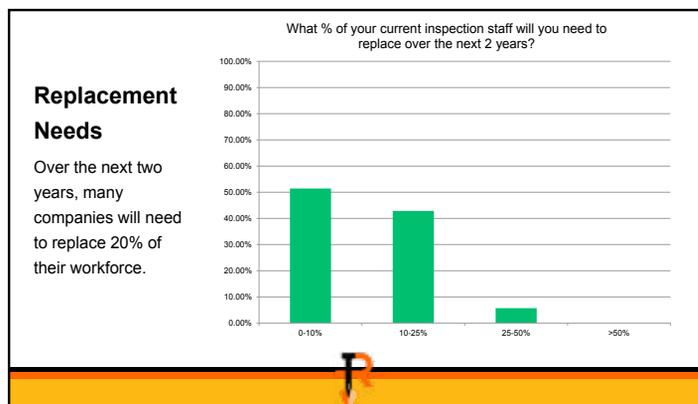


Figure 2. Utility companies need to replace an average of 20% of their inspection staff in two years

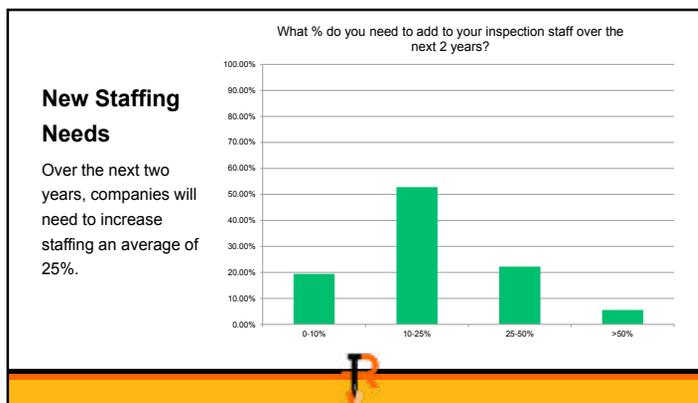


Figure 3. Utility companies will need to add new inspector staff equal to about 25% of their current workforce

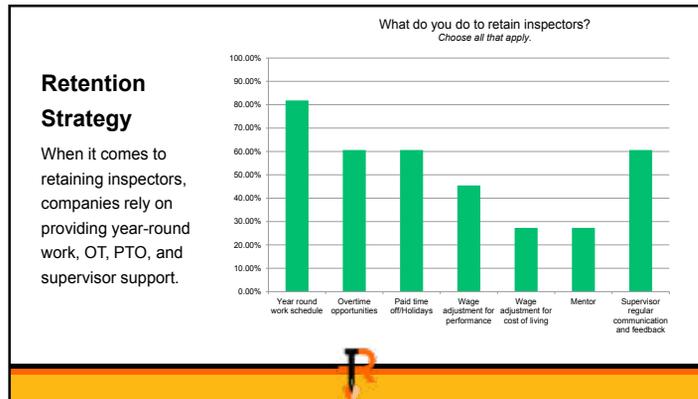


Figure 4. Most companies use year-round work, ot, pto, and supervisor relationships to encourage retention

THE COMMON MISCONCEPTION ABOUT PERFORMANCE

Typically, managers spend most of their time with “C” performers, trying to correct poor performance.

The chart (Figure 5) shows that, by understanding how the top performing front line leaders think, we can select those professionals who have the potential to perform at a high level and focus our time with “B” and “A” performers.

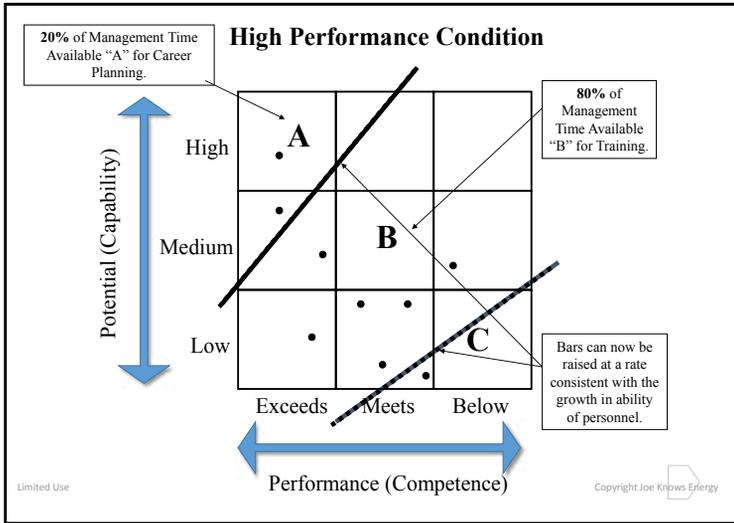


Figure 5. High Performance Condition

ELEVATE INSPECTOR PERFORMANCE: 5 STRATEGIES TO USE NOW

1. Benchmark Your Top Performers

What better way to raise performance than to study your high performers and replicate them?



Figure 6. When building high performance, priority is always people first

“The priority is always people first, followed by process and tools.”

The key to replicating your top performers is to understand how they think. How they think and process information ultimately drives their actions and the results produced.

Utilizing an assessment tool, along with an established benchmark of high performers and information collected during identification and selection allows us to replicate high performance.

This builds on the concept that, when building high performance, the priority is always **people first**, followed by process and tools.

The benchmark behaviors and information changes based on the role requirements. The inspector who is required to coach thinks differently from the one who focuses on record and report only.

2. Define Your Culture

Once you have defined what type of person is desired, then the next task is to define your culture, to ensure a good fit. We have discovered this is the primary driver of retention. There are many facets of a culture, here are several items to consider:

- What is it that makes your company unique?
- What roles do you require of this position?
- How are they supported?
- What are the work hours, what is the work season?
- What are the working conditions?
- What training and certifications are required?
- What is the compensation structure?
- What is the length of this opportunity?
- How do you measure success?

With information, selection criteria can be developed. We have found that the biggest driver is the type and amount of support that is provided.

3. Support with Team Leader

High performance teams understand that it is critical to performance and retention to understand how well the inspector fits in the culture. Does he or she feel like they belong?

The team leader’s job is to define performance and provide the tools and support to achieve it. The pressures that are on an inspector are unique, often in an environment where no one is happy with them.

The team leader understands these pressures and understands the whole person. They are available to address the concerns and support the inspector. They provide feedback on performance and help with development.



Figure 7. What is it that makes your company unique?



Figure 8. The team leader understands the whole person

4. Provide Performance Feedback

Often, we find that inspectors do not receive feedback in regard to their performance. Why is this? In general, we believe it is because performance has not been defined and because there is limited supervisor presence. The contractor's opinion is often not deemed as credible due to the oversight nature of the relationship.

We have found that significant effort is required to develop clarity of expectations. Once it is developed, additional investment is required to actually provide timely and relevant feedback.

Several vendors have developed digital reports and dashboards that provide immediate feedback to inspectors and a summary management dashboard. We believe this feedback, coupled with and supportive team leader is key, because it provides support even when everyone gets busy, when the feedback in most valuable.

It is also critical that the information tracked aligns with the goals of the organization. Often only errors are tracked. The question becomes, over time, "are we making progress?" We need to be able to track the # of errors over a defined # of total observations.

5. Provide Feedback in Both Directions

Based on our experience, what our clients really want is to have their inspectors help elevate their safety, environmental and quality culture. To achieve this, a continuous improvement culture needs to exist, with feedback both ways, to the inspector and from the inspector.

There are 3 questions that we are trying to answer:

What can we do to elevate our safety and environmental culture?

What is being done well, what are our blind spots, where do we need to focus for improvement, what do we need to invest more in? Often times, the inspector, who is at the front line, can see reality when others don't.

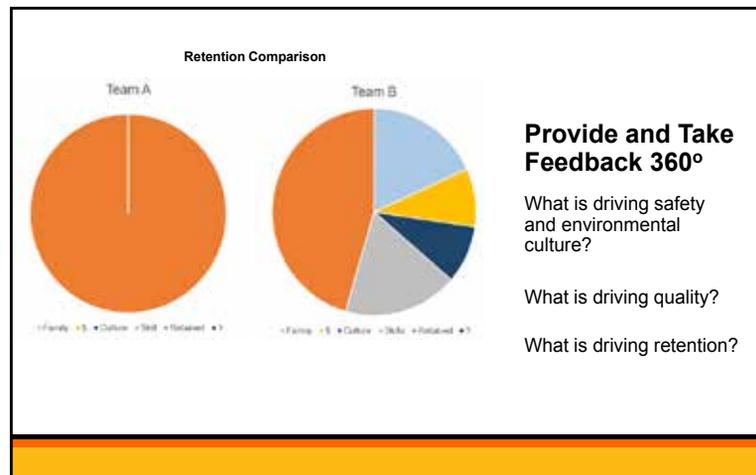


Figure 9. Retention Comparison

What can we do to elevate our quality culture?

With these assets being designed to last 50+ years, ensuring that they are installed properly is critical. The same questions we asked for safety apply here. Taping into the inspector's knowledge is critical.

What can we do to drive retention of talented people?

We have found that by focusing on retention vs turnover, we look at the challenge differently. We seek to understand what is attractive to talented people, and then create that culture (Figure 9).

SUMMARY

The industry survey revealed that many are struggling to find the needed capacity, capabilities and training needed to deal with the 45% increase in inspector capacity over the next 2 years. They are seeking strategies to retain talent. We have discovered the following 5 solutions:

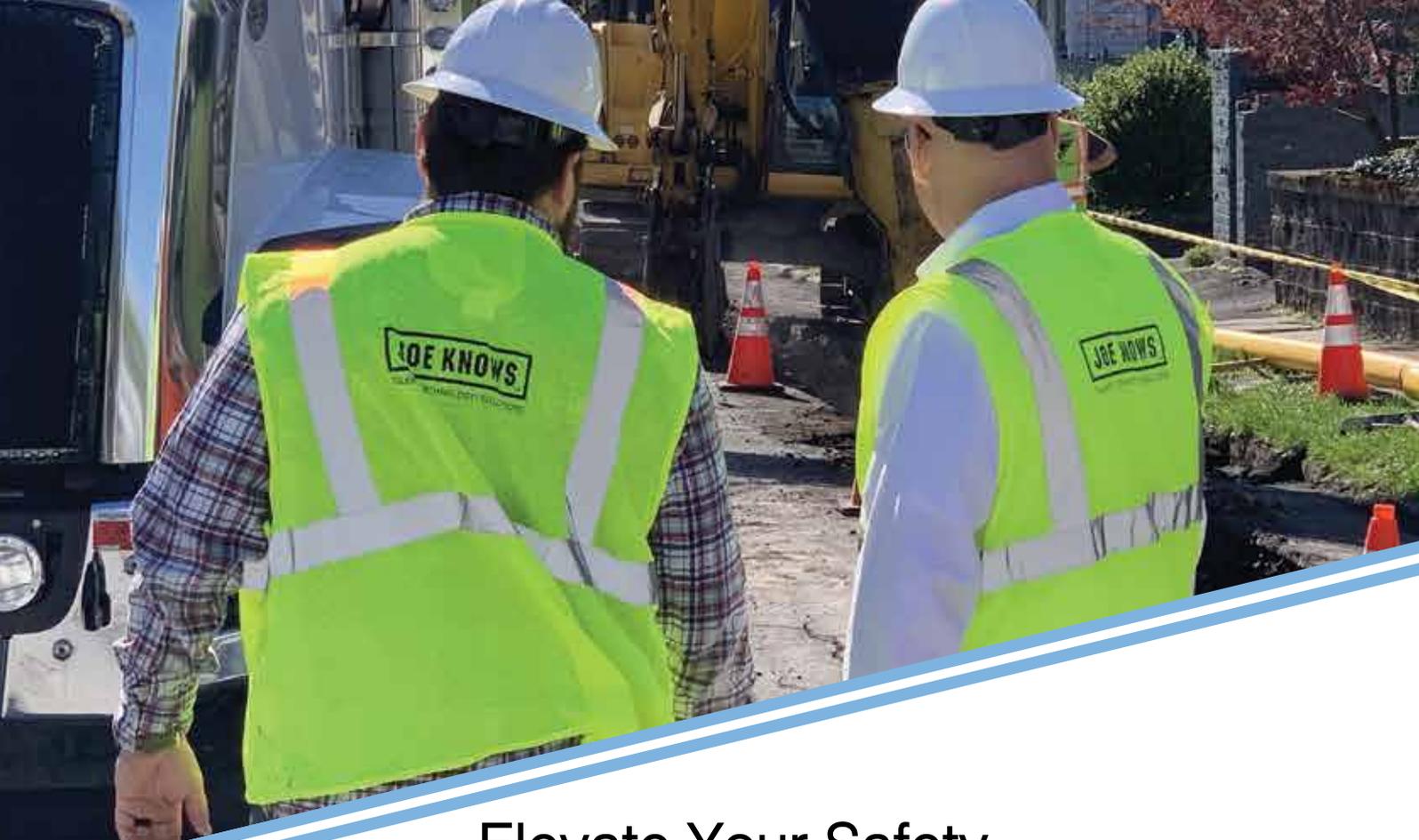
- Benchmark your Performers
- Define your Culture
- Support with Team Leaders
- Provide Performance Feedback
- Provide and Embrace Feedback both directions

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:



Dan Lorenz P.E. has over 30 years leading construction, training and inspection services companies. At Joe Knows Energy he is the Founder and President. He is passionate about elevating safety and quality cultures with frontline professionals. JKE provides staffing, recruiting and consulting services to the utility and energy industries.

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Elevate Your Safety, Environmental and Quality Culture

Utility companies throughout North America rely on their inspection workforce to help them protect people, communities, and the environment.

At Joe Knows, we've heard the needs of the utility industry and we're laser focused on helping you recruit, retain, and develop inspector workforces.



PEOPLE

+



PROCESS

+



TOOLS

WANT TO KNOW WHAT STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO ELEVATE SAFETY, ENVIRONMENTAL AND QUALITY CULTURE?

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