

## **CASE STUDY:**

# GROWING YOUR BUSINESS WITH APPRENTICES

**COMPANY:** North Construction & Building Pty Ltd

**HOTSPOT REGION:** Central Coast/Hunter

**TARGET:**

- How participating in community events supports recruitment strategies
- How rigorous recruitment processes improve apprentice retention rates
- How long-term apprentice programs can help position your business as an 'employer of choice'
- The benefits of supporting 'local jobs for local youth'

Founded in 1987, North Construction & Building is a trusted regional commercial construction company with an award-winning reputation for excellence. Having trained 57 apprentices since it began operation, North remains one of the lead businesses across the Central Coast and Hunter regions. More recently, they have established in Western NSW. This is a business tackling the critical skills shortage faced by the construction industry. The business currently employs 11 apprentices, 2 School Based Trainees, 1 Trainee and 12 Cadets.

### **Challenges recruiting in a skills shortage industry**

There are challenges when it comes to managing apprentice recruitment drives. These include:

- Finding students with the right skill sets, with a particular focus on numeracy skills
- Attracting females to a traditionally male dominated industry
- Influencing parents to support apprenticeship pathways in the construction industry over university pathways

Given longstanding efforts in this space, North averages more than 300 apprentice applications with each year's intake programme.

### **Building the profile of construction careers in the community**

Organic growth in the business is a fundamental philosophy for North Construction & Building. Therefore, their recruitment processes have a major focus at the junior development level.

- The business has a strong commitment to influencing perceptions of the industry. It continues to educate young people that construction careers come in many different options, not just hands on manual workers, but also includes design teams, back end support staff, site management and project management.
- The business has identified that female participation in the trades is highly valued yet highly under-utilised. Whilst it is still heavily male dominated, they continue to promote an inclusive work environment to attract female talent into its workforce.

- North recognise that early engagement of students through work-placement opportunities, industry presentations at school and career day participation, has greatly improved its attraction strategies. It continues to be very active in facilitating work experience placements for interested students.
- Team members actively talk to schools throughout the region, establishing and maintaining relationships with key stakeholders, including Career Advisors and Regional Industry Education Program officers. It also provides students with the opportunity to talk to its team of apprentices and cadets to find out what their typical day looks like and their career pathways/aspirations, to be more informed about a construction career pathway.

### **The benefits of rigorous interview screening**

North have a solid track record when it comes to apprentice recruitment as a result of their rigorous candidate screening and testing. They invest heavily in its recruitment process to seek out the right candidate that is the right fit for the business.

- Job applications require a range of mandatory questions to be answered and must include school reports and relevant certificates or qualifications
- Short listed candidates go through a phone-based pre-screen interview, from which only suitable candidates will progress to a face-to-face interview.
- Face-to-face interviews include the traditional panel scenario and candidates are required to complete several tests, including a psychometric test.

### **Workplace Culture and Values supporting apprentices**

A successful organic growth strategy ensures that the business maintains a strong, positive culture as the business continues to grow. Over the years, its rich history of investing in work placements, trade apprenticeships and construction management cadetships has contributed to the development of its future leaders, which greatly enhances North's positive corporate culture and strengthens the overall construction industry.

North has five values that drive the behaviour and culture within the company: trust, excellence, respect, relational and fun. These values are much more than just words. Testament to this is:

- More than 50% of all North's employees have only ever worked for the company.
- 25% of all North employees are participating in apprentice, trainee or scholar programmes.
- North was named Australian Medium Employer of the Year at the 2018 Australian Training Awards.
- North apprentices being recognised as National winners of the Master Builders Association – Apprentice of the Year on three occasions since 2015

### **Apprenticeships kick starting long term construction careers**

North has a firm commitment to investing in an individual's growth, recognising that personal and professional growth in its people is actually what grows their business.

Matthew Cook, Managing Director says “Investing in vocational education and training underlines North’s commitment to staff development and long-term careers. Being an employer of choice has long been a part of our company’s stated vision. Our vocational and education training offerings not only help us achieve this but also contributes to our success and longevity in the industry. Our programs allow us to maintain a strong, positive culture founded on well understood and practiced values as we continue to grow. At the same time, this support and training investment in people commencing their career, strengthens the overall construction industry.”

To support Apprentices as they transition to Leading Hand roles, North have utilised funding available through the Smart & Skilled program to further develop their leadership and management skills. This program allows candidates to gain partial qualifications toward Certificate IV Leadership and Management enhancing their professional development and overall growth. To date, 54 employees have successfully completed this training.

### **Supporting the community**

North is bringing the construction industry perspective to local community discussions, forums, outreach and activities.

Matthew added “The approach of genuine community engagement makes the experience more enjoyable and rewarding. Rather than a simple transactional relationship, engaging with the local community serves the purpose of contributing to something greater. To that end .....our purpose, in everything we do and say, we are building trust with our clients, subcontractors, employees and in our community.”

“We are currently laying the groundwork to replicate our efforts in Western NSW where we established an office in Dubbo early this year. Our plan is to offer similar apprenticeship and cadetship opportunities across our Western NSW projects.”

*To find out more about North Construction & Building’s culture and values, check out the link at <https://www.north.com.au/about-us/#values>*

