

Job training boot camps work for employers, unemployed

Applicants screened, taught basic work skills such as showing up on time

KATHY ROBERTSON | STAFF WRITER

Frustrated at his inability to find good entry-level electrical workers who are drug-free and will show up on time, Bruce Harwood turned to Construction Boot Camp.

The local program of the California Employers Association screens people looking for work, teaches them basic skills needed to apply for — and keep — a job, and connects successful graduates with potential employers.

The Sacramento-based association has conducted 19 training programs for the manufacturing and construction industries since 2003, with a 79 percent job placement rate for successful graduates and 82 percent retention rate one year after workers were placed on the job.

A new program targeting the hospitality, customer service and clerical industries starts April 16.

Harwood, human resources manager at Vasko Electric Inc., ended up hiring four or five workers from Construction Boot Camp. "Not all of them stayed, but it's worked well for us," he said.

Finding good, entry-level electrical workers is "damned near impossible," Harwood said. "I'm always looking for different ways to find employees and figured there's got to be a better way than putting an ad in the newspaper."

These boot camps are different from usual pre-employment training because

employers have a direct say in the screening criteria. A business might be willing to take a person with a spotty work record, for example but might pass on an individual with a felony conviction.

"It's a great way to have some employee screening done, so when you sit down with an employee at an interview, you know they can commit to coming to work on time — they did so at boot camp — and they've passed other criteria," said Lucia Munoz, a recruiting specialist with USA Properties Fund Inc. in Sacramento. She used to work at BZ Plumbing Co. Inc.

Munoz represented BZ Plumbing in one of the construction boot camps and will participate in the upcoming one on behalf of USA Properties Fund.

THE MISSING LINK

The boot camp started when the National Association of Manufacturers got a training grant from the U.S. Department of Labor and asked the local employers association what it could do to improve the skills of unemployed workers and prepare them for successful careers in the manufacturing sector.

The nonprofit California Employers Association provides human resource assistance to more than 750 businesses statewide. The headquarters is on River Park Drive in Sacramento.

Trainings are held in various places, including the Hillsdale Career Center run



Hugo Pueblo completed the Construction Boot Camp last May and found a job with Vasko Electric.

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by the Sacramento Employment and Training Agency, a frequent partner.

A common complaint from employers was that they couldn't find new, drug-free workers who would show up for work on time, said Terry Paterson, manager of the association's employment boot camp and on-site training programs.

The association designed a process for screening unemployed workers, followed by a one-week program that teaches them basic communication, customer service and conflict management skills, along with how to write a resume and interview for a job. The week ends with a graduation ceremony — and job placement for many of the graduates.

The "bare-bones" cost is \$8,000, but all of the programs have been paid for by grant funding from various organizations. Two local nonprofits, Asian Resources Inc. and Mutual Assistance Network, are partners in the April program.

144 HIRED SO FAR

Participating employers are asked to

explain their expectations, participate in a job fair and schedule an interview with every participant who wants one, but there is no requirement to hire a certain number of graduates.

A total of 13 Manufacturing Boot Camps have been held so far. Although orientation programs drew 385 people, 162 were approved for training and 145 showed up. A total of 127 people have graduated from the program; 103 got job offers, and 102 accepted them.

Winnowing the pool of construction workers brought a bigger toll. A total of 440 expressed interest, but 127 applied and 42 got — and took — job offers.

Hugo Pueblo, 27, went to Construction Boot Camp last May and has worked at Vasko Electric ever since. He'd been out of work about four months when he signed up for the training program. Before that, he'd bounced from one job to another.

"It's worked out well for me," he said.

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