

# Copier Careers White Paper

## Beyond Direct Compensation: Five Innovative, Realistic Ideas for Attracting Experienced Service Technicians

As if intense competition for equipment sales and service revenue weren't enough, independent copier dealers are hip-deep in another imposing challenge these days. Where are the OEM-certified, experienced service technicians required to support the dealer's customers and business model? What does it take to land a technician with the machine-specific skills, connectivity knowledge, positive attitude, and many other attributes that add up to a top performer?

Equally important, is it possible to attract this type of valuable talent when faced with the ever-rising costs of solid employee benefit packages, competition from better-resourced industry "giants," and a range of other pressures to keep revenues up and costs in line? If you are a dealer or hiring manager facing down these challenges, you are probably open to some new ideas.

### The People Who Back Up Your Promises

Most successful independent dealers promote and differentiate their businesses based on a bold customer service promise. Whether the center-point of that approach to the market is an uptime guarantee, response time commitment, or simply a pledge to provide service with a personal touch, good service technicians are a critical component to your success.

These people are indispensable business assets. So, where are they, and how can you increase your chances of securing their talents without over-extending your financial resources? After some brief background on the economic forces at work, this paper offers five suggestions that may help you do just that.

### Is Anyone Satisfied?

We are in a period of relatively stable unemployment, accompanied by modest recovery in economic growth and productivity. Looking beyond the raw numbers, though, we see evidence of a disturbing decline in job satisfaction across all occupations and income levels.

According to a recent survey of 5,000 U.S. households commissioned by The Conference Board ([www.conference-board.org](http://www.conference-board.org)), a non-profit management research organization, just 50 percent of workers describe themselves as "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with their current employment situation. Prominent sources of dissatisfaction include bonus plans and other employee recognition programs, promotion policies and, of course, benefit packages. In addition, many dissatisfied workers point to a lack of connection with their employers and the success of their current company.

Recent industry-specific surveys conducted by Copier Careers, a leading U.S. recruitment firm ([www.copiercareers.com](http://www.copiercareers.com)), clarify the presence of these same trends among service technicians. Real employee needs and expectations often clash with management's drive for greater productivity and cost-efficiency.

### It's Not All About the Money

The pop song that says, "It's money that matters," isn't pure sarcasm. There is no getting around the fact that a competitive salary and benefit package will always be a cost-of-entry for recruiting talent in a tight market. In this industry and many others, smaller businesses struggle to find and keep top employees – in competition with much larger, more heavily resourced companies like Ikon and Danka.

But – have you heard? – the billion-dollar companies haven't been as profitable as they (or their stakeholders) would like in recent years. This has meant cuts in workforce, cuts in benefits, and other cost-containing measures that may calm investors for a while, but also have critical costs of their own.

These tough business decisions drive down job satisfaction and loyalty. They erode employee confidence in the strength of the company and their own job stability. They inevitably put some outstanding people "on the lookout" for a job opportunity that better balances their economic and personal needs.

### Leveraging the Strengths of Your Company

Here is the kicker, representing a real opportunity for independents: Copier Careers' 2005 Technician Salary Survey uncovers some surprising facts about "what matters" to technicians about their jobs. Not far behind

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salary and benefits on the list of factors in job satisfaction are:

- (a) **financial stability of the company;**
- (b) **job stability;**
- (c) **[knowing] my knowledge is valued;**
- (d) **sufficient tools and support to do the job well; and**
- (e) **recognition for work well done.**

Together with the finding that 87 percent of responding service technicians acknowledged they are either actively (19 percent) or “somewhat” (68 percent) looking for other employment, this is very encouraging news for many small-to-midsize dealers. Yes, the salary/benefit numbers matter, but you may find you can compete for this talent by doing a better job of considering and meeting more “human” needs.

You may already have great ideas about how to showcase the positive aspects of your company. Let’s keep the perspective of a “target” technician in mind as we look at five methods for successfully connecting those strengths with real employee needs and goals.

## Five Ideas for Better Connecting with Talent

### 1. Define what you want, know what you can deliver, and spell that out clearly for the applicant.

In addition to OEM training and a strong aptitude for problem-solving, dealerships need service technicians that are honest and reliable. Solid “hard skills” aren’t worth much if they belong to an undependable person.

The surest way to get honesty from an applicant is to be up-front about your business, your management style, and your expectations. That doesn’t mean opening your books, or telling horror stories about the day the boss went ballistic. It does mean engaging in a real dialog with the technician about the principles, goals, pace, and daily operations of your company. Sincerity goes a long way in this exchange, and your candidate gets the benefit of many more opportunities to “picture” a better job situation than the one being left behind.

### 2. Apply “solution selling” in attracting talented, dedicated individuals.

Signing on with your company is a major “buying decision” for a qualified, in-demand service technician. Like other buying decisions, “price” (in this case, salary plus benefits) is only one of many important factors. While over-selling your company to prospective employees certainly won’t lead to mutual satisfaction or long-term gain, looking to match their needs to the positive aspects of your company is simply a good, productive business exchange.

Again, the goal is to leverage your strengths, relative to what you’ve learned (by listening) is most important to your applicant. Perhaps the candidate is frustrated with the lack of flexibility his current employer offers, or expresses a desire for better-defined job goals. Are these needs your business can fulfill? Are there other matches of this type that help you complete this all-important “sale?”

### 3. Try to resist the “first impressions” trap.

Some business owners and managers simplify the very complex process of hiring by relying largely on instinct. A tentative handshake or a guarded answer to a single “test” question during the interview is sometimes treated as grounds for disqualification.

Just like money, first impressions certainly do matter. There’s no denying that instinct is often valid. The problem? In this market especially, the goal is to discover, attract, and hire qualified candidates, not to “thin out” the field and move on. When you have an instinctive concern about assertiveness or some other personal attribute, consider laying that concern on the table and hearing the candidate’s response. If in doubt about trying this approach, consider engaging a recruiting firm with experts who’ve handled these situations many times before.

### 4. Show them your team... and that you know what “team” means.

Many companies now conduct panel or “team” interviews relatively early in the hiring process, and/or encourage open discussion between the candidate and current employees at different levels. The benefits to you are many: you can observe the candidate in a challenging group setting, garner others’ impressions and opinions, and learn more about how your strengths may answer the candidate’s concerns.

What’s in it for your target service technician? First and foremost, a “feel” for how people in your company interact with one another. Also very important: increased confidence in your company’s openness and fairness with employees, plus the opportunity to ask questions you may not be able to answer confidently yourself. The whole process begins to feel more like an equal, mutually beneficial exchange.

Other legitimate team experiences should also be part of your discussion with your candidate. If, for example, you practice some level of “team selling” that involves technicians and/or IT people in the sales process, it’s worth describing this to a candidate interested in adding skills or advancing in the business. Successful teams value cooperation, try to operate in concert, and recognize their stars – all of which hold a lot of value for most highly qualified job candidates.

### 5. Make commitments you fully intend to keep.

Along with highlighting any progressive, staff-focused practices in place at your dealership – such as open-door policies for supervisors, periodic team building sessions, performance-based bonus structures, etc. – take a stand on how you feel you can meet some of the candidate’s most important expectations. Honesty and commitment not only contribute to employee retention, the effort to uphold these values can attract top performers who are ready for a change.

## Let’s Make a Match

Both survey data and common sense suggest that there are ways to secure good talent without breaking your bank. The “secret sauce” for many dealers lies in reaching a deeper understanding of what matters most to qualified techs today, and applying that knowledge to show your company at its best. Engage with your candidates as individuals, and everyone can profit and be happy...for a while, at least.