



# RENTAL MANAGEMENT

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## Investing in your **workforce**



Planning for  
The ARA Show 2023

United Rentals  
celebrates 25 years

By Brock Huffstutler

# Investing in your workforce



**T**he “slow season” in the rental industry is hard to pin down. There are many variables that make it fall differently for everyone such as your rental segment concentration, your geographic location, whether there is a spur of projects stemming from an infrastructure funding bill or pent-up demand following coronavirus (COVID-19) lockdowns.

For many, however, the slow season that results in staff downtime still occurs during the winter months when harsh weather prohibits building projects or social gatherings requiring equipment, tents and other rented supplies. These are the windows of opportunity to make an investment in your business by providing education and training opportunities for your staff.

“We have found that the best time to focus on training is during the slower season, when there is more time available

for our employees,” says Heather Gray, HR manager, Rental Equipment Investment Corp. (REIC), Kalispell, Mont. “This allows them to be able to focus, ask questions and apply what they have learned.”

Gray says that taking a measured approach to building its training program has benefited REIC as the company has grown exponentially to more than 30 locations across eight states, and she names compliance and safety training as the primary areas of study.

“We offer our employees training during orientation and throughout their employment. Our new employees complete the ARA [American Rental Association] Professional Driver Education Program, forklift and MEWP [mobile elevating work platform] certifications, trailer coupling training, fire extinguisher training and fall protection training through our online learning

# Dark winter months can be a shining opportunity to train employees

management system called ‘Learnshare,’” Gray says.

Gray is a firm believer that devoting time and resources toward employee training not only boosts the company’s productivity; it also pays dividends in the areas of recruitment and retention.

“It presents a prime opportunity for employees to expand their knowledge base, strengthen their skillset, and boost productivity and morale. It lets employees know that you are invested in them both now and in the future, and that there are growth opportunities for them if they choose to pursue them. We have found that intentional commitment to ongoing training and education has provided us with strong results in talent acquisition, development and retention,” Gray says.

Melani Kodikian, CERP, president, A to Z Party Rental, Montgomeryville, Pa., says that while education at the time of orientation and throughout the year are important, offseason sessions are uniquely helpful in that they present dual opportunities for education and reflection on the season past.

“The offseason is the best time to highlight areas where employees need more or extended training to improve on their skills or add new skills,” Kodikian says. “It is the perfect time to review the successes and failures of the past season with your staff, hear what worked for them or where they need more help and change your procedures accordingly.”

Kodikian’s philosophy on employee training is that it is a vital investment in a business’ overall success. “The job can always get done, but will it be profitable? Will your staff and product properly represent your brand? Will your client refer you to their family or friends? Training establishes standards for your staff and helps them to meet expectations, which improves your customer’s experience,” she says.

Like Gray at REIC, Kodikian utilizes a blend of resources to train her employees, including ARA’s RentalU, manufacturers’ tent training schools and the MATRA (Manufacturers and Tent Renters Association) conferences. She maintains that the time, energy and cost devoted to their betterment sends a clear signal to employees that the company values them.

“Our staff have always enjoyed attending MATRA’s conferences and expressed great appreciation for our investment in them. The same holds true for RentalU and the fact that we take the time to give them tools to succeed. Staff want to do well, to work independently and know their time is well spent. Providing them proper training and tools to make their job easier and successful benefits

everyone,” Kodikian says.

While providing training to employees can enhance both company productivity and staff morale, the practice isn’t without an element of risk. There is the potential for a well-trained employee to be seen as a “hot commodity,” ripe for poaching by competing businesses.

“I think the old belief was not to train an employee ‘too much,’ for fear they would leave to go elsewhere,” says Dan Morris, general manager, Kennebec Equipment Rental Co., Fairfield, Maine, who prefers a more optimistic take on boosting employees’ skills. “My thought is, how valuable is an untrained employee? If we invest in the employee, I believe they will see their value within our organization and be far more valuable and, hopefully, more loyal to us.”

Kennebec Equipment Rental Co. views the winter months in chilly Maine as an ideal time for training but, like others in its field, has sometimes needed to set those plans on the backburner due to workflow demands. This winter, the company plans to make offseason training a top priority and to underscore that educational push, is throwing monetary incentives on the table for employees who reach certain training benchmarks.

“My hope is that investing the time, and in some cases money, into training will lead to a more loyal employee,” Morris says, adding that the training incentives could even attract new hires. “We are fortunate to have a pretty seasoned workforce, but in order to draw in new employees, I think offering that added benefit of formal training, and adding incentives after completing it, will help us stand out from the rest.”

Gray and her team at REIC also have been active in the promotion of educational opportunities as a means of attracting much-needed new blood to the industry.

“Recently, REIC became one of 11 companies that have partnered with a local college on their CDL [commercial driver’s license] program,” Gray says. “Company CDL employees assist in administering the driving portion for students qualifying to obtain their CDL. This is an effective way to acquire talent to fill our open driver positions while supporting the college’s program. We will continue to pursue partnering with other schools that offer a CDL program in all the other states we operate in as well. Currently, we are in the beginning stages of building a Diesel Mechanic Certification Program for eligible employees, and we provide apprenticeship opportunities for high school students who are interested in working in the industry.” ♦