

How to recruit Technicians

Zitko Group





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INTRODUCTION

Why are we creating this guide?

The fire and security industry's biggest issue is the lack of talent in the workforce.

There are several reasons for this:

- **Firstly, the industry is highly specialized and requires specific technical skills and knowledge**, such as understanding of fire codes and regulations, alarm systems, and access control systems. This means that finding qualified candidates who possess these skills and knowledge can be difficult.
- **Secondly, the industry is not always seen as an attractive career choice by people.** Students may not be aware of the various career paths available in the fire and security industry, or they may not be aware of the earning potential and opportunities for growth. Older job seekers are simply not aware of the industry and the many benefits it can offer those looking for long-term careers and personal development.
- **Thirdly, the industry is also facing competition from other industries** that offer similar technical and engineering positions, such as information technology or engineering. This makes it harder to attract and retain talented individuals.
- **Fourthly, there is a lack of diversity in the industry**, with few women and minorities represented in leadership positions. This can make it harder to attract a diverse talent pool.
- **Finally, the industry is also facing a wave of retirements** as older workers leave the industry. This means that there will be a significant gap in experience and expertise that will need to be filled by new hires.

Overall, the lack of talent in the fire and security industry is a major issue that needs to be addressed to ensure the safety and security of communities and businesses.

Apprenticeships are one solution, and a long-term one at that. The industry needs to do significantly more to address the skills and labour gap if it is to sustain its long-term future.

Apprenticeships and internships have been around for years but they've been massively underutilized and implemented by both employers and providers. They generally attract a small (but very relevant) element of the labour workforce, traditionally those between the ages of 16 and 21. In the main, those over that age do not want to be an apprentice, nor do they find the nature of the coursework and training stimulating.

Falling into the industry

Whenever we attend industry events and meet new joiners to the industry. One thing is common. The majority of first year candidates into the industry have joined because a member of their family or friendship group already works in it.

On most occasions the number is as high as 90%.

Why is this?

When someone has a positive experience working in a particular industry or with a specific employer, they are likely to share their experience with their friends and family. This can pique the interest of those who are looking for job opportunities, and they may consider joining the industry themselves.

Additionally, personal connections can provide insights into the culture, work environment, and career paths within the industry. Candidates who have friends or family working in the fire and security industry can gain a better understanding of what the work entails and what it takes to succeed. They may also receive advice and guidance on how to navigate the job search process, including where to find job openings, what skills and qualifications are required, and how to prepare for interviews.

Moreover, personal connections can also provide a level of familiarity and comfort when starting a new job. Candidates who join an industry where they already have connections can feel more confident and supported, as they have people they can turn to for advice, guidance, and mentorship. This can lead to better job satisfaction and retention rates, as employees are more likely to stay in an industry where they feel valued and supported.

Put simply – **they're aware of it.**

The second most common answer for anyone over the age of 30 is "I fell into it". Meaning they did not actively plan or pursue a career path in the fire and security industry but ended up in it by chance or circumstance.

This can happen for several reasons, such as:

- **Unexpected opportunities:** Sometimes people are presented with unexpected job opportunities that they did not actively seek out but were offered due to their skills, qualifications, or connections.
- **Lack of direction:** Some people may not have a clear idea of what career they want to pursue and may take the first job that comes their way.
- **Necessity:** In some cases, people may take a job out of necessity, such as to pay bills or support themselves or their families.
- **Personal circumstances:** Life events, such as a move to a new city or state, a family member's illness, or a change in personal circumstances, may cause people to take a job that they did not actively pursue.

The key here is that once in the fire and security industry, people stay.

Indeed, recent Zitko surveys of candidates highlight a significantly high proportion of employee satisfaction and continued optimism for both their own and the industry's future. No mean feat in an ever-changing and challenging economy.

Sticky and secure

So what does this mean?

Once candidates are aware of the industry, either through personal insight through friends and family, or because they joined by chance – it becomes a highly attractive, secure and progressive industry to be part of.



Why?

- **Job security.** Security and safety are essential needs for individuals, businesses, and organizations, and these needs rarely decrease, even in times of economic uncertainty. Therefore, the demand for professionals in the fire and security industry remains high, providing job security and stability for those who work in this field.
- **Career advancement.** With technological advancements and evolving threats, the industry is constantly changing, and there are opportunities for individuals to advance their skills and knowledge. There are also opportunities for leadership and management roles, which can bring higher salaries and greater job satisfaction.
- **Making a positive impact on society.** Professionals in this industry play a critical role in protecting people, property, and assets from threats such as fires, theft, and terrorism. This work can be fulfilling and meaningful, as it contributes to the safety and security of communities and society as a whole.
- **Stability.** Security and safety is an area of investment that is rarely cut regardless of economic factors. Businesses and organizations recognize the importance of investing in security and safety measures to protect their assets and reputation. This means that even in times of economic uncertainty, the fire and security industry is likely to remain stable and in demand, providing job security for professionals in this field.
- **Benefits.** For many, the opportunity to be kitted out on day 1 with a vehicle, tools, uniform, laptop and phone is a pretty cool thing. The flexibility that technical careers can offer at all levels is also highly attractive, whether in managing your own workload for calls or installs or balancing home and office work at commissioning, servicing, applications and network levels.
- **Variety.** Security and fire safety systems and practices are applied to a wide variety of environments and systems to protect people, property, and assets from harm.

Some of the systems and environments where security and fire safety are applied include: Commercial and residential buildings, Industrial sites, transportation systems, data centres: public events: healthcare facilities, critical national infrastructure, educational institutions and many more - there is something for everyone!

Overall, a career in the fire and security industry can bring job security, career advancement opportunities, the chance to make a positive impact on society, and the stability of working in an area of investment that is rarely cut.

Now take that message proactively to the right talent pools and...

The secret sauce

“There are no candidates out there”.

We hear this all the time, usually coupled with “it’s impossible to recruit technicians”. Actually, there are thousands of candidates out there, all hugely relevant and with the right core skills.. Just like those who joined via their friends or family, or by chance, they have the temperament, desire and attitude to be incredibly successful in this industry. Why do we accept that some of our best people fall into the industry, but not do anything to systemise that process?

By first understanding the value of the talent OUTSIDE of our industry and then systematically attracting that talent to it, we can fill jobs, recruit great people, increase diversity and plug skills gaps. All for the simple reason that despite the competition from other industries and the so called ‘War on Talent’.

THIS IS A GREAT INDUSTRY TO BE PART OF!

But attracting and recruiting is only one part. In the next sections we’ll tell you how to find them, how to engage your team and business on the process and then what you’re going to need to do once you’ve got them.



PREPARATION

Changing habits

Imagine having more candidates than vacancies.

Imagine engineering jobs being filled within 4 weeks.

Imagine enjoying recruitment.

Zitko Group clients who have embraced the need for a shift in mindset, a change of approach and a new plan of action around recruiting talent are seeing incredible results - not just in their job fulfilment, but in their revenue growth, profit margin and employee satisfaction.

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results” – Albert Einstein.

Companies and employers in the fire and security industry are traditionally poor at recruiting talent for several reasons, including a lack of investment in recruitment strategies, innovative sourcing, low marketing investment, unwillingness to train, and a general reluctance to do something different.

- **Companies continue to rely on traditional recruitment methods**, such as job postings on job boards, agency introductions from competitors and employee referrals, rather than investing in innovative recruitment strategies.
- **Employers do not invest in marketing efforts to raise awareness of their brand** and attract potential candidates making it difficult to attract candidates who are not familiar with the industry or the company's brand.
- **There is a reluctance to train and develop new talent within the industry.** The preference is to hire candidates with previous experience rather than investing in training and development programs. “If we train them, we’ll lose them!” This limits the pool of potential candidates and leads to unfilled vacancies and a continual cycle of salary hyper-inflation. All the while continually making the shortage of talent in the industry progressively worse.

By investing in innovative recruitment strategies, marketing efforts, and training and development programmes, employers can start to attract and retain talented individuals and build a more skilled and diverse workforce.

So a change is needed, and that’s step 1! And arguably it’s the biggest and most challenging step to take.

Attitude is everything.

When you think of your best people, what do they have in common?

Is it their certification, qualifications, or years of experience in the industry? Or is it their personality traits and their aptitude?

When speaking with Zitko Group clients, the number one common denominator in a business' best people is attitude. It is literally everything.

An employee with a positive attitude is willing to learn, take on new challenges, and adapt to new situations, even if they lack experience.

Attitude determines an individual's work ethic: Great employees take pride in their work, are committed to the job, reliable, trustworthy and work hard to achieve their goals.

An employee with a positive attitude is friendly, approachable, and easy to work with, while an employee with a negative attitude may be hostile, unapproachable, and difficult.

Attitude determines an individual's ability to adapt: Great people are flexible, open-minded, willing to take on new challenges and adaptable, while an employee with a negative attitude may be rigid, inflexible, and resistant to change.

Experience is important, but it can be acquired over time, while attitude is an intrinsic quality that is harder to develop or change.

Focus the your recruitment on attitude and aptitude and simply ask the question.

Can they learn it? Can we train it?



Fail to prepare, prepare to fail.

Take a look at the industry now, or your own business and you'll see people from a range of backgrounds.

Military or law enforcement, engineering or technical backgrounds, construction or trade, customer service or sales, carpentry, plumbing, electrical even education and training.

So why aren't we systematically recruiting more great people from these kinds of backgrounds?

Combining transferable skills with a great attitude is a recipe for success. Or as Einstein himself might say.

Transferable skills + Great attitude = Most chance of success

Understanding what works in your business, or has the most chance of success when it comes to the backgrounds of the individuals you recruit is a great start to considering your plan of attack before going to market.

However there are other factors to consider.

What clients do we have now and what clients are we targeting in future? What technologies will they be using, and what do we need to be equipped to utilise?

No one business is the same. There is a huge difference in the kind of individual maintaining alarm systems in residential and multi-dwelling establishments versus the applications technician supporting 'proptech', smart buildings and complex access control.

Build out your profile and be clear on what is right for your business.



Internal engagement

You might be sold, but are your team?

It's not just you who needs to go through a mindset shift, it's your whole business. If you don't have the buy in of your hiring managers or key decision makers, you'll be stuck doing things the same way as before and wondering why nothing's changed.

You'll need:

- **your hiring managers on board** assessing candidates for the right things. When you've only recruited one way this can be hard at first.
- **your teams to understand the value of what you're doing.** Their own growth, career development and opportunities can only be strengthened if their employer gets stronger.
- **mentors and role-models** as well as the individuals developing your new recruits with the required training.

What you're promising

Qualified
Motivated
Competent
Supported
Safe
Integrated
Inducted
Knowledgable
Self-aware
Customer focused
Emotionally Intelligent
Bought in
Engaged



What you're not promising

Experience
Legacy Knowledge
Multi-system understanding
Perfection
Speed
Regional variation
Versatility
Independence
Bad habits
Industry baggage
Inflated egos / expectations
Miracles





Training the trainer

Getting your most experienced staff to buy into the process can be a challenge, particularly if you need them to pass on their knowledge. Having your best people pass on their knowledge and experience in a professional work environment has many benefits, including improved performance, increased productivity, better succession planning, career development, team building, and organizational learning.

Whilst the benefits are plentiful, there are also several reasons why someone might not want to play ball:

- **Fear of losing job security:** Some employees may worry that if they share their knowledge and expertise with others, they may become less valuable to the organization and be at risk of losing their job.
- **Lack of time:** Experienced employees may be busy with their own work and not have enough time to dedicate to teaching others.
- **Lack of interest:** Some employees may simply not be interested in teaching or mentoring others, preferring to focus on their own work.
- **Lack of confidence:** Sharing knowledge and expertise can be intimidating, especially if the person doing the teaching does not feel confident in their abilities.
- **Lack of incentives:** Some organizations may not have formal programs or incentives in place to encourage employees to share their knowledge and expertise with others.
- **Burnout:** Experienced employees may already be overworked and burned out, making it challenging to find the time and energy to teach others.

You can't force your team to get involved, but if you can address some of these concerns, not just in the context of the benefit to the business, but also in the value to the individual, you'll have the best chance of success.

Benefits to the individual include;

- **Personal satisfaction:** It allows experienced individuals to share what they have learned over their careers and contribute to the development of others.
- **Recognition:** When experienced individuals share their knowledge and expertise, they are often recognized as experts in their field. This can lead to increased professional recognition and respect from colleagues and industry peers.
- **Improve communication skills:** Experienced individuals must be able to convey complex ideas and information to others effectively, which can help them to refine their own communication skills
- **Improved teamwork and collaboration:** Helping others learn and develop can lead to stronger bonds and a sense of camaraderie within the team.
- **Personal and professional growth:** Your best people may learn new things about themselves and their field, which can help them to continue to develop and grow throughout their careers.



RECRUITMENT

The Big Shove

Remembering that most people join the industry either through friends and family, or chance (e.g. application for a relevant role) and once in the industry, tend to stay. That means the industry has a high attraction and retention rate for those people who get to know about it.

Let's put a conversion number on that attraction rate of 20%, meaning that for every 5 people who see a friend or parent working in the industry, 1 joins. And for every 5 people who see a relevant advert in our industry, one applies.

Now let's put a retention number on those that join of 50%. So for every 10 people who come into the industry, 5 stick around forever.

Finally, through these methods, let's say the industry at this moment in time is attracting, or better put, getting itself in front of 10,000 people every year. That would mean that 2000 people are joining the industry, with 1000 of them staying.

Admittedly, these numbers are loose at best, and backed up more by opinion than cold hard data, but you'll see where we're going with this.

In order to recruit the technicians the industry needs, let alone the ones you need in your business, we need to systemise that attraction process and introduce the industry to significantly more of the eligible working population.

Rather than wait for people to fall into our industry, we're going to shove them into it!

We estimate the security industry is short of upwards of 50,000 technicians when considering the aging workforce and the changes in technology. So, by our numbers above, we need to 'introduce' the industry to at least 500,000 people, to recruit 100,000 of them and then retain 50,000.

And ideally that's 500,000 people who either have a potential interest OR the transferable skills to be successful.



So, tailoring this down to your business – if you need 1 technician, we need to speak to 10 relevant candidates to recruit 2 and retain 1. If you need 10, it's attract 100, recruit 20 and retain 10. And if it's 100, it's 1000, recruit 200 and retain 100.

Now for the good news.

Combining the right recruitment process with an effective onboarding plan can push the retention rate of hired candidates above 90%. In the 30 months since launching Zitko Talent in the UK, 92% of the technicians recruited into the industry are still with their employer.

That's huge testimony again to the power of this industry to be able to attract and retain great people.

Advertising and Marketing

The key to successful recruitment marketing is putting the right proposition in the right places.

Traditionally, employers advertise on the same websites, with the same ad copy, or even worse with the same job descriptions masquerading as adverts.

By widening the net and understanding that talent pools are not just in one place, we can not only attract more of the right kind of people, we can also impact the diversity of those applying.

Here's a checklist to ensure the best possible chance of success:

- ✓ **Create a job advert, not a job description.** 3 tips – get the main 'hook' in the top line, write from the point of view of your candidate, asking what's in it for them? Avoid using corporate bs.
- ✓ **Use clear, concise language to highlight the job requirements, responsibilities, and benefits.** Make sure the advert includes a call-to-action to encourage potential candidates to apply.
- ✓ **Run your ad copy through a gender-neutral copy programme** to ensure its suitability and inclusiveness.
- ✓ **Engage on multiple job platforms,** local, state, national and specific. Consider paid ads depending on requirement volume, urgency.
- ✓ **Create a programme brochure and high impact collateral** (A5 size, social media graphics) highlighting the benefits of the role, the nature of the work and the training candidates can expect.
- ✓ **Consider branding your programme as an academy, school or scheme.** Something like [Company Name] Engineering Academy or [Company Name] Technical Fast-Track Initiative can increase credibility and application response rates.
- ✓ **Engage with trade bodies, military career specialists, relevant forums and online communities.** Let them know you're recruiting.
- ✓ **Consider non-industry trade magazines and publications** (print and online) over in-industry, targeting the relevant transferable skills you prefer e.g. building, electrical, carpentry, IT.
- ✓ **Automate as much of the initial phases of the selection process as possible** with screening questions, video interview software, personality profiling, evidential content. You're going to receive a lot of applications.
- ✓ **Ensure every applicant gets some kind of response,** good or bad. You have an opportunity to promote this industry in a great light, and word spreads.
- ✓ **Use social media platforms to promote the job opening.** Target the big 5 at least - LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, TikTok and Facebook. Create supplementary posts that highlight the company culture, the exciting projects the technician will work on, and the benefits of working in the fire and security industry.

- ✔ **Consider using targeted advertising** on these platforms to reach a wider pool of technicians who may not be actively searching for job openings. Warning – this can be expensive and unless you're targeting a very specific industry or niche set of skills, probably unnecessary.
- ✔ **Create and use video content** – most popular and relevant being day in the life vlogs, employee success stories, candidate testimonials. Creating video content around the specific job, application process and how-to guides can also be extremely powerful and engaging.
- ✔ **If you have a vision, mission or values, articulate them** throughout the advertising process.
- ✔ **Be clear on the working arrangements** – recent surveys have shown that flexibility is one of the top drivers for candidate attraction, and our industry and the role of an technician can offer this.
- ✔ **Implement a campaign specific employee referral program.** Actively targeting family and friends will significantly increase the relevant applicant pipeline. Good practice is filling at least 10% of open vacancies with internal referrals. Although many companies offer up to £5000, £1000 is more than enough to generate the right kind of interest. Additional benefits like extra days holidays can also be used.
- ✔ **Attend sector specific recruitment events, such as trade shows and conferences, university, college and school fairs.** Booths or tables can be acquired for free or for very little outlay but generate huge interest if in the right environment. Warning – don't expect to hit the jackpot by attending one event. It can take a few goes to find the most effective.
- ✔ **If candidates are to be interviewed by multiple hiring managers in different regions, create a structured interview plan** set against the attitudes, traits and relevance of the applicants. Ensure all hiring managers are briefed to create consistency in the process, selection criteria and candidate experience.
- ✔ **Have fun!** All Zitko clients have commented on the refreshing energy and engagement candidates bring to the interviews.

RETENTION

Training

One of the biggest misconceptions about trainees or training programmes of this nature is the amount of time needed in the classroom.

When we've outlined that Zitko Talent candidates usually undertake about 6 weeks of training and are working 42 weeks out of the year (allowing for holidays), clients are always surprised. The common expectation is that their new candidates would require almost 50% of their first year dedicated to classroom-based training.

It's simply not the case.

Most technicians would say that whilst their theoretical training was essential, it was their real-world experiences that really honed their skills.

That's not to say intensive classroom courses don't have their place, they of course do at junior and apprenticeship levels. The majority of candidates with life experience or transferable skills however will respond better to short sharp high impact training.

Fortunately, this type of training is generally provided by the manufacturers who have some of the best trainers around. Training is provided on-prem or virtually and generally product suite specific. However, many manufacturers are happy to train on theoretical elements like electrical, electronic, networking or cloud principles too.

By combining these courses with short, general technical courses that come with qualifications, your technicians will remain motivated and engaged whilst quickly being able to implement their learning in the real world.

Whilst every company has different training requirements dependant on their product suite and customer verticals, the best balance of training versus real world experience remains around 1 in 8. **In other words, for every 8 weeks of work, 1 week should be dedicated training.**

How this is delivered depends entirely on your set up. There is no right and wrong. Some employers go for an intense training period in the first 3 months, whilst others space out the training over the course of the first year. As long as you have planned your training programme before beginning the hiring process, your employees will only be expecting you to deliver against that plan.

Engagement

There's one final piece in the puzzle.

Having done all the hard work, the last thing you want is to lose your technicians early in the process. Remember that for your new recruits, it's a new industry, a new career, and that regardless of age or background, they can justifiably feel unsettled in those crucial first few months.

Communication is key, and at the most basic level via their manager on a regular basis. However you can also conduct surveys at key stages throughout their onboarding and first year.

Example survey questions	Poor				Excellent				
	1	○	2	○	3	○	4	○	5
Rate your onboarding experience.	○		○		○		○		○
Rate the training you've received so far.	○		○		○		○		○
Rate your experience in the role against your expectations.	○		○		○		○		○

Did the onboarding process effectively prepare you for your role?

Did your training adequately prepare you to perform your job duties?

Did your manager provide you with sufficient feedback and support during your training period?

Were there any areas of your job duties that you felt were not adequately covered during your training?

Did you receive the necessary tools and resources to perform your job duties effectively?

Did you feel supported and welcomed by your team during your onboarding and training period?

Would you recommend the company's onboarding and training program to a friend or colleague who is starting a new job?

Assigning a mentor within the business (external ones could also be available) who is not necessarily the employees' line manager can also be a great way to support them through those early phases. This is especially true of anyone coming from a minority background who may feel more overwhelmed in the role than others.

As a simple example, the current percentage of female technicians within the industry sits at 1%. You can reasonably expect to recruit over 10% female candidates by implementing the processes outlined here. Supporting those applicants with a suitable mentor can make a huge difference to their engagement and retention. Having someone similar to relate to, whatever your background can make all the difference when starting a new job.

Market forces

Preparing them for what lies ahead is also worthwhile, and we're not talking probations or training here. Your new employees will quickly become productive, efficient, and probably indispensable. They're also likely to generate attention and not always the kind that's helpful.

While the talent remains scarce, competitors would like nothing more than to recruit your brilliant new people, so expect approaches either from internal talent acquisition, recruiters or agencies. Direct approaches are more common than ever as the shortage drives more businesses to aggressive recruitment tactics. The availability of automation, video software and social media in the job search also makes it easier to make those contacts.

Stopping the approach is impossible, but preparing for it isn't.

The fantastic thing about your new people is that they'll be more loyal than most, with the investment you're making in them reciprocated through engagement and buy-in. That doesn't mean you should be complacent, however. By making candidates aware of the likelihood of this kind of contact, either through your talent solutions partner or their managers, you remove the elements of surprise and flattery and increase the levels of resilience to the approach.



SUMMARY

Why?

- We're short on technicians, and at the current rate of recruitment and retirement, we'll be even worse off without changing the model.
- Most people in this industry 'fell into' into it. The blueprint is there, we now need to replicate and systemise it.
- We can solve recruitment issues and increase diversity within the industry at the same time, a clear double win.
- People stay in this industry. It's resilient, stable, varied and relevant. We should be shouting about this from the rooftops.
- The right people are out there, they just don't know about the opportunities in this industry.

Ready

- Investing in the process before you begin will reap huge rewards further down the line.
- Attitude is the glue that holds all skills and traits together. Speak to most companies about what their best people have in common, and it's not experience or qualifications, it's their attitude.
- Decide what transferable skills your requirements suit best. Build your recruitment and assessment process around those.
- Don't be blind to great people without the core transferable skills. Focus on the two key questions. Can they learn it? Can we train it?
- Engage your team. Without them onboard, your plan has a lower chance of success. Use the 'what we're promising, what we're not' graphic.
- Find, motivate and even reward your lead people for training and passing on their experience.

Recruitment

- For every one person you need to recruit and retain, you'll need to 'attract' 10 people to your vacancy.
- 92% of technicians recruited through Zitko Talent, using this process, are still with their employers.
- Write an advert, not a job description and market it on multiple platforms. Ensure the advert is inclusive and includes yours and the industry's key selling points.

- Create supporting material like social collateral, video content, case studies, employee success stories, day in the life content.
- Automate the early phases of the process, using screening questions, pre-recorded video questions and aptitude testing.
- Implement an in-house referral programme and get those friends and family in!
- Ensure all hiring managers are clear on a consistent interviewing and selection process.

Retention

- Training remains one of the best ways to support employee engagement.
- The training provided to your candidates doesn't have to be onerous. One week in eight is a great balance.
- Short, sharp, impactful courses work best for candidates with existing real-world experience.
- Support your new recruits with regular check-ins, open communication, and structured feedback surveys.
- Assign a mentor, if possible, ideally someone close or similar in background or personality.
- Expect your candidates to be approached and prepare them for the event.