



WHITE PAPER

Hiring an Estimator: Four skills for success

Estimating Help Wanted! Wouldn't it be nice if it was that easy to find an estimator? Just hang the sign out and have qualified people lined up? Finding the right person can be a challenging and time-consuming process but it is critical for the continued success and profitability of your business.

My old boss used to say, "When you hire an estimator, it's like handing them your wallet and saying, 'Be nice to me.'"

If someone comes along with great experience and fits in with your company, you've done great. But what if not? What skills do you need if the fully experienced person doesn't apply? Over the years, I've trained many new estimators on our software program. There are four key skills or personality traits that have stood out repeatedly among the more successful estimators. These are good indicators of whether the person you have hired will be able to not only handle the job but be precise and accurate when estimating.

Remember these four skills easily by thinking of **the acronym METL**.

1. MATH MIND

Give a simple math test to each candidate. During the interviewing process, you're relying on information provided on a resume combined with what the applicant tells you they can do. Ask them to demonstrate their skills by taking a math test. It doesn't have to be complicated but should consist of some simple math and word problems similar to what estimators deal with every day. This will help you determine right away if the person might be the right fit. If they don't have a math mind, you're wasting your time. There have to be some basic math skills that can be built upon.

2. EXPERIENCE (IN THE FIELD)

As a young estimator with almost no field experience, I needed checklists to make sure I didn't forget things. Then, times got hard and I was given the option to work in the field or get laid off. I chose the field. After a few months, when back in the office, the checklist was in my head.

Talk to your candidates before you hire them to determine what their experience is out in the field. Set the stage that the expectation is that they understand the entire business in order to prepare the most accurate estimates. Field experience in your trade is a huge plus for someone to understand the concepts needed for a proper estimate.

Hiring the right person for your company is challenging at best, but if you find a **METL person**, you've got a great start.

3. TECHNOLOGY SAVVY

Today's estimating duties usually require working with various software programs from email and word processing to takeoff programs. Someone already comfortable with other software can learn your programs much easier. Most of the younger applicants will have grown up using technology and this shouldn't be an issue. If you do have more seasoned, experienced estimators applying for the job, be sure to find out what programs they know how to use.

4. LOYALTY

Find someone who will stick around. Look at their employment history and how long they have stayed with each employer. If they did make moves, find out why—it may have been necessary for career growth or other reasons. Ask the person about their career goals and where they see themselves in five years. Nothing is guaranteed, but if you have the right working atmosphere and hire loyal people, you will be more likely to keep them.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Joe Pettit is a Senior Training and Support Specialist at Estimating Edge, where he has worked for the last 28 years and has trained over 1,000 estimators on The EDGE®. Prior to that he worked in the construction industry as an estimator, project manager and superintendent for various general contractors.

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