



The Building Materials Talent Crisis

By Burt Clark

Leadership retirements, workforce shortages, and increasing competition for specialized talent are reshaping the industry. Here's how manufacturers, distributors, and search and recruitment firms can work together to build stronger organizations and sustainable growth.



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Having spent much of my career in and around the construction industry, I have always found it to be a relationship-driven business. Whether serving residential construction, commercial contractors, institutional projects, infrastructure development, or specialty markets, success has traditionally depended on established reputations for product quality, distribution networks, operational excellence, and trusted customer relationships.

Today, however, another factor has emerged as perhaps the most significant competitive advantage of all, and that is talent.



We find that across the United States and Canada, manufacturers, distributors, fabricators, and specialty building products companies are facing an increasingly complex and competitive landscape for talent. The challenge isn't as simple as finding people to fill open positions. Companies are struggling to identify, attract, develop, and retain experienced specialists, operational leaders, and leadership talent that's capable of driving growth in an increasingly competitive market.

For many organizations, growth plans are being limited not by customer demand, production capacity, or market opportunity, but by the availability of qualified talent.

The Perfect Storm Facing Building Materials Employers

We see several long-term workforce trends converging simultaneously to create unprecedented hiring challenges throughout the industry.

Retirement of Experienced Industry Leaders

Many of the industry's most experienced professionals are approaching retirement. Plant managers, operations directors, branch managers, regional sales leaders, and executive leaders who have spent decades building institutional knowledge are leaving the workforce faster than they can be replaced and the challenge extends beyond replacing a title.

When a veteran leader retires, companies often lose:

- Decades of customer relationships
- Deep product knowledge
- Industry-specific expertise
- Leadership experience
- Market intelligence
- Internal mentorship capabilities

Unfortunately, many companies have not adequately developed succession plans to prepare the next generation of leaders.

A Shrinking Pool of Technical Sales Talent

The modern building materials sales professional must be far more sophisticated than previous generations due to the technical nature of the people they interact with such as:

- Architects
- Engineers
- General contractors
- Specialty contractors
- Developers
- Facility owners
- Institutional buyers
- Distribution partners

The ability to navigate specification selling, consultative sales processes, and complex project cycles requires years of industry experience and relationship development. We find that these professionals are rarely active job seekers. Most are currently employed, highly compensated, and viewed as critical contributors by their current employers.

Manufacturing and Operations Leadership Shortages

Manufacturers across multiple industries are competing for the same operational talent which means that building products companies are increasingly competing against:

- Advanced manufacturing firms
- Industrial products manufacturers
- Logistics organizations
- Distribution companies
- Infrastructure suppliers
- Construction technology companies

As a result, positions such as Plant Manager, Operations Director, Supply Chain Director, Procurement Leader, and Continuous Improvement Manager remain among the most difficult roles to fill.

Digital Transformation is Changing Hiring Requirements

The building materials industry is evolving rapidly and companies are investing heavily in:

- ERP systems
- CRM platforms
- Data analytics
- Demand forecasting
- E-commerce capabilities
- Automation technologies
- Artificial intelligence applications

Employers increasingly need leaders who can bridge traditional industry expertise with modern business practices and finding candidates who possess both capabilities remains a significant challenge.

Why Traditional Hiring Methods Are Falling Short

Many organizations continue to rely heavily on job postings and inbound applicants and while these methods may be effective for certain positions, they often fail when recruiting experienced specialists, managers, directors, and executive leaders. These people are most likely to be within the passive segment of the talent market and can only be engaged via direct contact.

You can expect that the strongest candidates will be:

- Fully employed
- Performing well
- Not actively searching
- Selective about opportunities
- Difficult to access through traditional recruiting channels

How Recruiting and Executive Search Firms Can Become Strategic Partners

The most successful recruiting firms aren't functioning as transactional resume providers but instead, are functioning as strategic talent advisors supporting organizations in resolving broader workforce challenges. The relationship between employers and search partners should be collaborative, consultative, and aligned around long-term business objectives.

Start with Business Goals, Not Job Descriptions

Too often, hiring conversations begin with a list of responsibilities and qualifications instead of doing a deep dive around asking: "What business problem does this hire need to solve?"

Is the company:

- Expanding into new markets?
- Improving operational performance?
- Preparing for leadership succession?
- Launching new products?
- Strengthening distribution partnerships?
- Improving profitability?

When your recruiter or search consultant understands the underlying business objectives, they can identify candidates who bring the right capabilities, not just matching experience.

Conduct Talent Mapping Before a Search Begins

One of the most valuable services an executive search partner can provide is market intelligence. My colleagues and I share decades of experience in the market and have extensive knowledge, relationships, and experience across relevant products and services and the people that provide them.

We are able to provide comprehensive talent mapping which helps employer hiring managers understand:

- Where top talent currently works
- Competitive organizational structures
- Leadership availability
- Compensation trends
- Succession risks
- Market movement patterns

Possessing this intelligence and data can enable hiring managers in making better hiring decisions before a search even begins.



Build Ongoing Talent Pipelines

The best time to identify future leaders is before an opening exists. Organizations that continuously build relationships with potential candidates gain a significant competitive advantage when vacancies occur.

Recruiting firms with experience in the building materials and construction industry can be a valuable resource in helping clients establish long-term talent pipelines for:

- Operations leadership
- Commercial leadership
- Technical specialists
- Product management
- Supply chain management
- Executive leadership

When a critical opening emerges, the groundwork has already been established.

Expand the Talent Lens Beyond Direct Competitors

I often see employers limiting themselves unnecessarily by focusing exclusively on candidates from direct competitors when we know that the strongest leaders may actually come from adjacent industries such as:

- Industrial manufacturing
- HVAC
- Electrical products
- Plumbing products
- Construction technology
- Industrial distribution
- Engineered products

As highly experienced search and recruitment professionals, we are well positioned to help employers evaluate transferable leadership competencies and identify candidates who can bring fresh perspectives while still understanding the industry's dynamics.



Improve Candidate Assessment and Selection

Experience alone does not guarantee success, partnering with firms like The ExeQfind Group or The QualiFind Group can help you evaluate:

- Leadership capabilities
- Strategic thinking
- Change management skills
- Cultural alignment
- Growth potential
- Relationship-building abilities

The objective is not simply to identify who can do the job today, but who can help the organization succeed tomorrow.

Support Succession Planning Initiatives

One of the greatest opportunities for collaboration between employers and search firms lies in succession planning. We find that the most forward-thinking organizations are increasingly asking:

- Who will replace our key leaders?
- Which positions represent the greatest risk?
- Where are our internal development gaps?
- What external talent options exist?

By addressing these questions proactively, organizations can reduce business disruption and create stronger leadership continuity.

The Future Belongs to Talent-Driven Organizations

As change is constant, we know that the building materials industry will continue to evolve. Economic cycles will come and go. Product innovation will accelerate. Customer expectations will change. And technology will continue reshaping operations and commercial strategies. What will remain constant is the importance of attracting and retaining exceptional people.

We find that organizations that view talent acquisition as a strategic business function rather than an administrative process find themselves to be best positioned to outperform their competitors. Likewise, recruiting and executive search firms that move beyond transactional placements and become trusted advisors will create the greatest value for their clients.

The future of the building materials industry will not be determined solely by products, pricing, or production capacity. It will be determined by leadership, expertise, relationships, and the ability to secure the talent required to execute a company's vision.

In today's market, talent is no longer simply an HR issue. It is a business strategy issue.



Burt Clark is a Senior Recruiter with The QualiFind Group, where he specializes in managing search engagements across the construction and building industries. He brings a practitioner's perspective to executive and professional recruiting, grounded in years of hands-on experience as a licensed General Contractor in Georgia and as the former owner of his own construction company. His operational background helps him assess talent with strong technical credibility and match candidates to the real-world demands of construction leadership roles.

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About The QualiFind Group

The QualiFind Group is a California-based talent acquisition firm focused on providing specialist to managerial recruitment to client organizations throughout the Americas. We offer a diverse team of recruiters based across Canada, the United States, Mexico, Chile, Peru and Brazil with experience supporting multinational organizations wherever they need talent.



About The ExeQfind Group

Our Atlanta-based executive search practice – The ExeQfind Group provides mid-management to executive leadership talent to organizations across the Americas and in 45 countries through our global alliance partners on 6 continents. The ExeQfind Group is comprised of accomplished executive search consultants located in Canada, the United States, Mexico, Chile, Peru and Brazil.



Forbes magazine has consistently ranked The ExeQfind Group among the **Top 200 Executive Search Firms in North America** and The QualiFind Group among the **Top 200 Professional Recruitment Firms in North America** for the past six consecutive years.