

AVIATION WEEK

& SPACE TECHNOLOGY

AEROSPACE WORKFORCE

Formulas That Work

What organization doesn't want first pick of the most desirable engineering and technical talent? They all do, of course, but making it happen is easier said than done.

The first requirement is to know what aerospace and defense professionals consider most meaningful in a job. According to AVIATION WEEK's 2007 Workforce Study, "Where A&D Professionals Want To Work," technical challenge heads the list of the three top considerations. The other two are education/career growth, and a workplace where individuals are made to feel valued and able to contribute.

The following companies profiled are the ones that ranked the highest in the top three categories. Some organizations use large size to put greater emphasis on education/training, while others are smaller and use that size to react quickly to recruiting opportunities and mold a more personalized and stimulating work environment.

Regardless of how they're positioned in the supply chain, what these companies have in common is an appreciation of what it takes to attract and keep highly qualified individuals.

Investing in Employees

Hitco Carbon Composites ranks number three in this year's list of "Where A&D Professionals Want To Work" for the professional development and valuing the individual categories.

Ed Carson, chief operating officer, has a clear view of why: "We're moving toward offering more complex design and development [to customers] and have invested millions of dollars in equipment and tooling to enable our work with the most advanced materials in the industry," he says.

The mantra for Hitco employees is: "Invest, perform, grow."

Laying out large composite skins on spars is a time-intensive task, so investment is crucial to automate as much as possible. Traditionally, "perform" has meant achieving 25% contours on a surface. But the more complex aircraft that Hitco works on today require well above that level of contour. The company introduced an automatic fiber-placement machine, with the potential for two production beds to enable this type of capability.

However, Carson says, investment in automation doesn't outrank investing in people. "We have to keep the experts to 'lay-up,' and we need people energized and educated to use our new technologies," he says. There are new expectations, but there are also opportunities for career growth, such as programming for large machines and more complex design-engineering skills.

Hitco provides slightly more than 37 hr. per employee


per year of education, at every pay level. "Each person has a training plan, and we measure against that plan," Carson adds.

To assure that employees remain with Hitco after this investment, Carson is focusing on developing leaders. "We can't afford high turnover, and you can buy people for only so long," he says.

"It's been proven over and over again that the immediate supervisor is who makes the most difference in an employee's satisfaction, so we're focusing on building that relationship. And the base is that leaders do what they say they will do. The smaller you are, the better employees can see through it when leaders don't."

Hitco's plans are to grow 2.5 times greater than the 2007 business level and size within the next five years. That means about 1,000 employees in the future, versus today's number of nearly 400.

Hitco has spent a long time focusing on the diversity-rich community of its location, just outside South Central Los Angeles, and about 50% of its employees are women. "People want to live where they work, and work where they live," he says. "We live in a diverse area where there is diversity in our executive leadership, engineering, assembly and hand lay-up (hand application of material).

"We have to grow using the model we have today—learning, leading, doing what we say." 



HITCO CARBON COMPOSITES, INC.

“AN EMPLOYER OF CHOICE”

Since 1922, HITCO Carbon Composites has been a pioneer, an innovator, and a leader in the development of advanced composites. HITCO has participated in most of the major aerospace, naval, commercial aviation and automotive programs that have defended our nation, made our lives easier, and made us one of the world's technological leaders. We are now rated as a “Gold” supplier to the Boeing Company. This is the highest recognition awarded to a supplier for excellent quality, on-time delivery and cost management. We are also the only supplier in Boeing's history to be awarded “Supplier of the Month” for two months in a row. We recently celebrated this achievement with a companywide awards ceremony recognizing our dedicated and talented workforce that made this world-class distinction possible.

HITCO strives to maintain a culture that recognizes employees' needs for flexible work weeks, work-life balance, and rewards suggested improvements by employees. Upper management is intimately involved in day-to-day operations, thereby maintaining open communication and full involvement by all.

HITCO Carbon Composites is committed to fair and unbiased recruiting procedures and does not discriminate based upon race, sex, age, sexual orientation, religion or ethnic origin, veteran status or any other legally protected status. We maintain a safe, healthy, drug-free workplace. We seek the best people for the jobs we offer and will assess applications on the basis of the relevant skills, education, and experience needed for each position.

We are looking to hire highly motivated talent as we move forward to help lead the aviation industry in its shift from metal-based aircraft structures to carbon composites. We are pushing this technological shift so that we will maintain a leading global presence as a supplier to top-tier customers who are seeking guidance in transforming their businesses. We have invested millions of dollars in upgraded equipment to provide cutting-edge technology to build and produce commercial and military aircraft carbon composite structures.

Many have made a lifelong career at HITCO where creativity and participation by all is encouraged and rewarded. If you love a challenge, join our team and help us build on our proud heritage by advancing our technological leadership through creativity and progressive thinking as we build the aircraft, ships, and land based vehicles of today and the future.

