



Recruiting Loggers: Millennials Seek Financial Security



By Mark Turner

I have had numerous conversations over this past year, involving the lack of young people going into the logging business. Everyone seems to have their own opinions about why the problem exists and persists.

I recently talked with a mill representative about this problem. He suggested that the solution is education. He said that “we need to reach out to, not only students, but also teachers. Since they are the ones that advise the students”.

My reply was “oh, you mean like we have been doing for the last 25 years?” I went on to explain that we have been doing that with very limited success. He was convinced that “education is the answer to the problem”. And didn’t really want to hear any more about it.

It is my contention that the problem is much more complicated than that. I have a logger friend who has three sons that are involved in the business. From the outside, his company looks like the perfect example of a logging company with an effective transition plan. However, this logger confided to me that one of his sons had recently asked him if he thought there was “a future in logging”? He said that the best answer he could tell his son was “I don’t know”.

When you think about it, that’s a very damning statement. But, in a nut shell, it describes where we are at. If we can’t, as loggers ourselves, say with confidence that there is, not only a future, but a bright future, then we are in serious trouble.

I had to get a new phone a few months ago and the young guy that was helping me, started asking questions about my logging company. It was obvious that he knew a little about logging. He asked, “How much he could expect to get paid, if he decided to go logging?” I explained what the average starting wage was, for someone with no experience. He immediately responded with “double that and I’d think about it”. I must admit, I was a little shocked by that statement. However, he was just stating what was on his mind. His job at the phone store didn’t pay much less than a beginning logging job, however, it was a lot easier. I felt a little embarrassed to explain that the profit margins are so low in logging, which we can hardly afford to pay the going rate.

Then there was the young guy, with his family, that I met in a restaurant. As we were waiting to be seated, we started up a conversation. When he learned that I had a logging operation, he told me that he had logged for a while. He told me that he liked logging, but continued to explain that he could hardly pay his bills, much less get ahead. He explained that he works for a construction company now and makes the kind of money he needs. His last word to me were “logging is way too hard of work for way too little money”.

When I talked to a forestry professor, at Oregon State University, he explained to me that “beginning wages in the logging business have traditionally been three times the minimum wage”. Unfortunately, things have gotten really out of whack over the last 25 years. Now the minimum wage is only slightly below the starting wages for loggers.

I keep hearing about how millennials think completely differently than we did when we were young and that it will take a new approach to get them interested in logging. I don’t think they are really that different at all. I think there are a lot more opportunities for them than there were for us, when we

were young. But I think they really want the same basic things that we wanted. They want to feel like they are appreciated and that there is a future in what they are doing. They want to be able to make enough money to be able to buy a house and raise a family. And even be able to buy some of the finer things in life.

In my opinion, until we can provide those things for young people, anything else we do to try to recruit them into our industry, will fall flat on its face.

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