

Navigating the Sea of Grey – Sabine Surveyors’ Legacy Solution

Sabine Surveyors, Ltd. is proud of the company’s growth from a sole proprietorship in 1968 to today’s group of professionals who make up one of the largest Marine Surveying and Consulting firms in the U.S. We enjoy an excellent domestic and international reputation, a high profile client base, and steady volume of challenging opportunities. The legacy of our ESOP company is very important to all of us, and we are conscious that many in the surveying field are aging, greying professionals, with retirement just over the horizon.

In 2013, with the future of our company in mind, we went to work identifying our long term staffing goals and how we would achieve this. Our executive management team was confident that we could continue to grow our business if we aggressively worked to attract the right mix of people to carry it forward. Past experience taught us that focusing exclusively on senior talent was not the only answer, and that to grow we needed a cross section of youth and experienced marine personnel to cement the legacy of our company. We all committed to an aggressive recruiting effort to attract recent maritime college graduates, but more importantly an aggressive program to bring the best possible candidates of all levels into our system, and train, nurture, and develop them into the Sabine’s staff of the future.

The longest tenured staff members at Sabine typically have been graduates of maritime colleges including Kings Point, New York Maritime, USCG Academy, Maine Maritime, Cal Maritime, Mass Maritime, as well as many foreign Maritime Colleges. Three of our most experienced senior managers are graduates of Texas A&M.

The proximity of Texas A&M Galveston to our six office locations in the U.S. Gulf, their established career days, and the welcoming attitude by their Director of Counseling & Career Services was a logical starting point for our new recruiting model.

Texas A&M sponsors two recruiting fairs each year and we participate in both. This gives us the opportunity to meet with a large number of maritime graduates, share with them who we are, and collect resumes from potential hires. After each fair, our internal team reviews resumes, conducts phone interviews, schedules in-person interviews, and subsequently discusses the genuine career opportunity we will afford to a select few.

The interview process is key as we want to sell our company to the candidates, but equally important is to establish an environment for them to sell themselves. In the process, we outline our developmental program for two candidates to live and train together at our New Orleans office for a period of six months. We do not sugarcoat the challenges that surveyors face in our industry; outside, hot, cold, wet, dry, fluid 24/7 schedules, holidays, weekends, etc. We make it crystal clear to them that we are offering world class training, a career opportunity, and are only interested in career-minded candidates who are prepared to make a personal investment on a par with the investment Sabine will make in them. These positions are not stopover points, and we anticipate that the surveyors we hire for this program would be in leadership roles within our organization during the next ten years. They know in the first interview that this job is not for everyone, nor does everyone we interview fit our model.

The narrowed field of candidates are further reviewed by the management team. Finalists are offered an opportunity to demonstrate aptitude traits that are key to this business, interviewed again by our New Orleans Area Manager who is responsible for the program, and offers are made to the top two.

The chosen candidates, who we refer to as Squires, share a company provided apartment for six months in New Orleans, "Where the River Never Sleeps". This is the busiest Sabine office, and during their six months of working on the river, they will be exposed to a full spectrum of assignments, training classes, peer review, report writing, quality procedures, ISO, marine calculations, and other skill development sessions. Our senior personnel have committed themselves to this program and generously share their knowledge with our new associates. We emphasize the importance of results not excuses early on, the value of constructive criticism, timeliness of submitting all reports, accuracy, ethics, and professionalism. At the end of the training period we discuss their future with them and how they can best make a contribution going forward to Sabine as well as options regarding their next assignment location. The training is on-going, and the Squires know their future success is up to them and how they take advantage of the program.

To date, the results have been excellent. We have brought in recent maritime graduates, "Two by Two", on six month intervals into the program, and the success, both for Sabine and our Squires, has been better than expected. Not everyone has worked out, but the retention rate and the contribution that these new members of our profession are making reinforces our program as a successful model. With mutual effort and commitment, this program will continue to succeed.

An unexpected consequence of the program is the rejuvenating effect it has had on our entire staff. Our most experienced employees have embraced the program and are taking genuine pleasure in sharing their 20, 30, and in some cases 40 years of experience with our Squires. Their generosity and nurturing is a joy to observe and to participate in.

Going forward, Sabine will expand the program and use the recruiting model at other maritime colleges and industry career fairs. This is good for our future, and is a contribution to the profession.

We will gladly discuss our recruiting and training efforts with others. Please contact Captain David Pereira, President of Sabine Surveyors, Ltd. for additional information.