



The Time to Fill

How to help limit the impact of staffing on operations.

BY MICHAEL MILLER

The rental housing industry is facing a challenge: Finding and keeping quality people within the workforce. This labor shortage is making it harder for companies to provide great customer service to residents, and it's putting extra pressure on the teams that are already in place.

To tackle this issue, many companies are rethinking how they hire, train and support their employees. Some are offering higher pay and additional benefits. Others are focusing on building a strong company culture where employees feel valued, welcomed and supported. Some are doing everything they can to compete and stay afloat. Career growth is also a big focus; allowing workers to find a clear path to move up in the industry also helps keep them motivated and loyal.

Technology is playing a growing role as well. Artificial intelligence (AI) is being used to handle routine tasks like answering common resident questions or scheduling tours. This frees up onsite staff to focus on more people-centric activities. While AI can help, it's not a full solution. People are still the heart of the rental housing industry.

At the same time, companies are looking at how to make jobs more flexible and appealing. That might mean offering remote work options for some roles or creating new positions that blend customer service

with leasing skills, and hybrid positions entice employees, too.

Find out what's working and where there's still room to grow. From smart hiring strategies to the use of AI, the goal is the same: Build strong teams that can deliver great customer service and keep communities thriving.

Understanding the Landscape

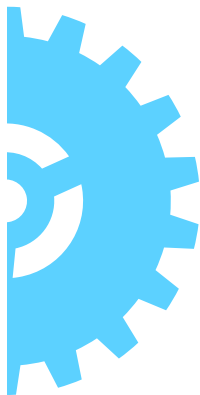
The challenges and, in turn, the solutions surrounding staffing have evolved during the past several years, and now vastly include finding and retaining quality maintenance technicians.

"In contrast to previous years, maintenance job posts receive significantly fewer applicants and usually remain open, unfilled for several weeks," says Gladys Pagan, Assistant Vice President of Human Resources, Draper and Kramer. "That shift with this position as well as other roles that are becoming more challenging to fill has resulted in us proactively identifying which skills we can train versus which skills are essential for a candidate to already possess when they join our team in order to be successful."

When roles stay open for longer periods, resulting in longer hours, more errors and slower responses, teams can often see burnout and lower morales. This can also impact resident events and resident engagement.

"A labor shortage in the multifamily industry has a direct and often compounding impact on onsite operations, resident satisfaction and overall business performance, and it's something leadership can't afford to ignore," says Chris Simon, Executive Vice President, RADCO.

"Burnout is a real concern," Simon says. "Onsite staff are



dealing with more demanding residents and a sense of being ‘always on,’ especially in larger or luxury communities.” This has resulted in an impact on work-life balance and mental health as well as higher turnover rates.

When there aren’t enough maintenance technicians at a community, everyday repair requests accumulate, urgent updates might be postponed and scheduled upkeep can be forgotten about. In leasing offices, a shortage of personnel means slower follow-ups with prospective residents, fewer or less effective property tours and delays in processing applications. This leads to a staff that is stretched thin, instead of a proactive team focused on delivering exceptional customer service.

“From a business standpoint, persistent labor shortages introduce operational risk and can impact brand reputation if left unchecked,” says Alanna Mahone, EVP, Human Resources, Landmark Properties. “When properties are understaffed, maintenance backlogs grow, resident complaints increase and online reviews suffer. These issues can reduce lease renewals and slow new lease conversions.”

According to Andrew Kadish, CEO of Maryland-based CAPRE-IT, there’s been a shift away from maintenance careers toward technology-related jobs. Other reasons include wanting to move away from after-hour emergency calls toward more traditional office hours, and employees can often earn more money in commercial or other construction roles.

“Ultimately, resident dissatisfaction may lead to lower renewal rates, driven by a perception of poor service or unfulfilled expectations around community living,” Pagan says.

Simon says leadership must step in to rethink compensation, invest in training and development, prioritize employee well-being and stay ahead of trends. “The staffing challenges aren’t going away – but with the right approach, property management teams can better attract, retain and grow the talent they need to succeed.”

Another large change for the industry and staffing has been the use of different technologies and artificial intelligence.

“With the rise of smart property technology, AI leasing assistants and sophisticated property management software, there’s a growing gap between the tools being adopted and the skill sets of many employees,” Simon says. “Upskilling and ongoing training are no longer optional, they’re essential if teams are going to keep up.”

Strategic Thinking

Attaining & Retaining

“We’ve found that leveraging our social media presence to highlight what our company culture is all about is one of the most powerful ways to communicate these intangible but critical factors to attract the right talent,” Pagan says, referring to the company’s purpose, values and culture.

Lori Flaska, Vice President Human Resources with Habitat, says they use virtual meetings to help create a human connection in early interview stages. “We also emphasize employer branding on platforms like LinkedIn, giving candidates a behind-the-scenes look at what it’s like to grow a career with us through sharing our successes. To retain top talent, we have regular check-ins with staff to ensure alignment across the board.”

In tougher hiring markets, it’s important to “be open to different experiences, industries and skill sets,” Pagan says. “Likewise, supporting employees with opportunities to grow internally through cross training or access to continuing education not only helps attract new talent but also helps a company build a reputation as a top workplace.”

RADCO is focusing on training and development. “A lot of onsite staff leave because they don’t see a clear future at their property or within the company,” Simon says. The firm is currently building career paths and mentorship programs, which will also lead to funding for certifications and licenses. There is also the Property Support Team of 10 service and administrative

professionals to assist on short notice.

“One way to attract and retain the best people is by fostering a culture that rewards good performance and achievements and offering greater flexibility in work-life balance and paid time off,” says Elie Rieder, founder and Chief Executive Officer of Castle Lanterra.

Workforce Expectations

Staffing and employment have changed during the past several years. Fully remote positions or roles that only require part of the time in the office have become popular; however, many jobs in rental housing are in-person.

The pandemic caused Habitat to adjust staffing models, going more from a property, onsite approach to a “centralized staffing approach with the goal of creating more career paths for growth which will build opportunities to create regional roles that support and oversee multiple properties,” Flaska says. “This model allows us to drive greater efficiency, promote consistency in operations and offer employees broader career development opportunities across a portfolio rather than a single site.”

While remote and hybrid positions are in high demand, those roles might not fit business needs. This has required housing providers to be flexible in their offerings.

Compensation expectations have also adjusted in recent years. “Today’s candidates want competitive pay, better benefits and a clear career path,” Simon says. “Inflation and the rising cost of living have only made this more urgent. Maintenance

teams, in particular, are in high demand, and companies often find themselves in bidding wars just to fill those roles.”

Landmark is centralizing within its staffing model, “allowing for more efficient, consistent execution of certain tasks,” Mahone says. Organizations are also using what Mahone calls a “career lattice” model, which gives employees the ability to focus on interests and skills across departments rather than traditional vertical career paths. “As companies adopt centralized service models and AI-driven tools, employees are expected to upskill in areas like data analysis, remote communication and digital platforms. Training programs are being expanded to support this evolution.”

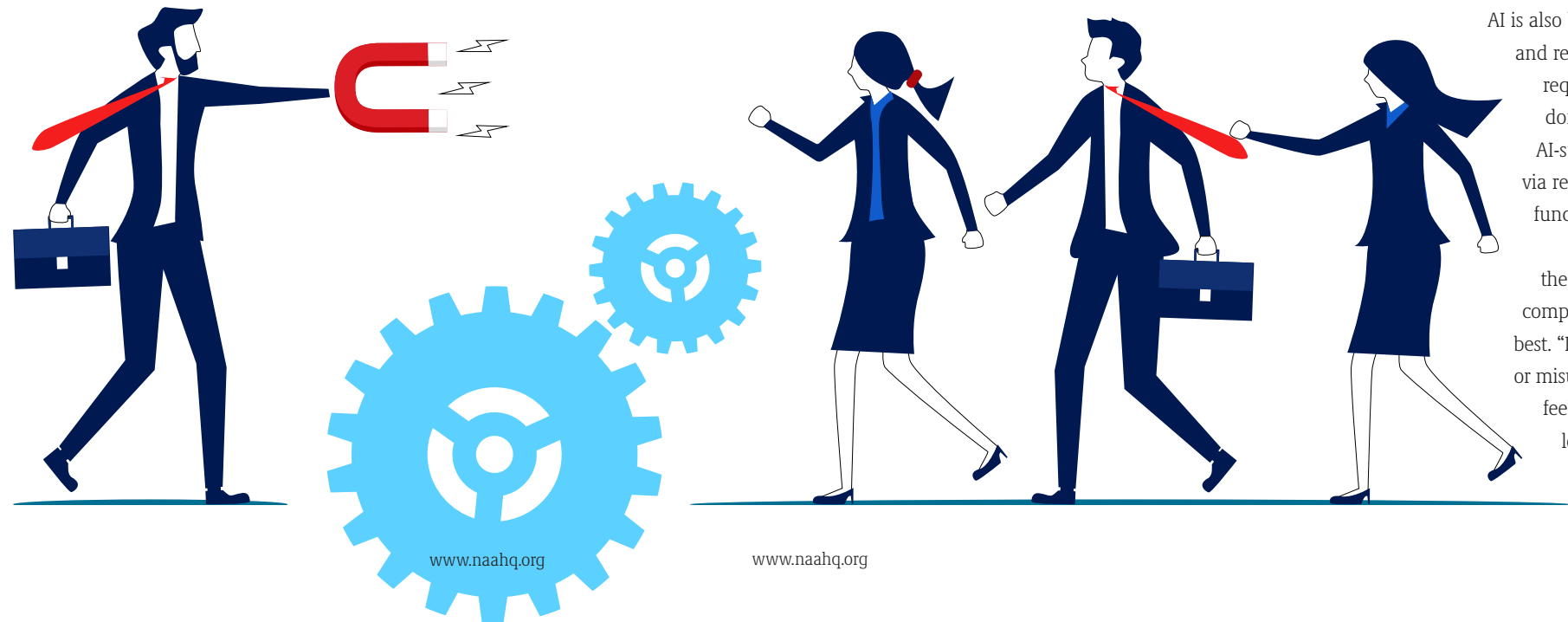
Company culture and values have also been brought to the forefront. “Today’s workforce, especially younger generations, expect their employers to walk the talk when it comes to diversity, equity and inclusion,” Simon says. “They’re looking for purpose, growth opportunities and a workplace culture that aligns with their values.”

Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence found an entry point into the industry via entry-level, customer service-type offerings like chatbots for FAQs or virtual agents to schedule tours. The idea behind the use of AI is efficiency and consistency and onsite time saving, Simon says. “It’s not about replacing people, it’s about helping them work smarter, not harder,” he says. “When your team isn’t bogged down by manual tasks, they can focus more on resident experience and property performance.”

AI is also being used to help collect rent and reduce the number of maintenance requests, Mahone says. This is being done through third-party apps and AI-supported after-hour responses via resident reminders, among other functions.

However, it’s important to note that there can be hiccups along the way as companies figure out what items work best. “If AI tools fail to resolve issues quickly or misunderstand requests, residents may feel frustrated and underserved – leading to decreased satisfaction and trust,” Pagan says.



Tracking Progress

Employee engagement and productivity are key performance indicators (KPIs) for evaluating staff success, Pagan says. This also includes check-ins with new hires and hiring managers to ensure there are no challenges or need for reassessing skills and roles.

“One of the most critical indicators is time to fill, which tracks how long it takes to hire for a role – from posting to offer acceptance,” Mahone says. “In high-turnover positions like community managers or maintenance technicians, reducing this time helps ensure properties remain fully staffed and operational.... A high [offer] acceptance rate suggests that compensation, role clarity and culture resonate with applicants, while a lower rate may signal the need to revisit job structures or benefits.”

Landmark uses performance reviews, retention data and manager feedback to track candidate quality. “This helps refine hiring criteria and improve long-term workforce stability,” Mahone says.

Landmark is also tracking career progression through internal insights. This includes registering how often employees are promoted or move laterally – data into career development and talent retention.

“Retention and attrition rates are critical for understanding why employees stay or leave, as well as providing insight into which properties might be struggling,” she says. “...High [employee] engagement correlates with better performance and retention, while utilization data helps balance workloads and prevent burnout – especially during peak leasing seasons.”

Universal Challenge

Finding and retaining qualified staff is not limited to a single location. Every metropolitan area has its own challenges. While operations and the supply-demand flow were adjusted for renter migrations during the past several years, staffing models were also affected by these moves. “Labor is more readily available in regions with more affordability like the Southeast and the Midwest; whereas in high-cost coastal markets, it is much more difficult to attract and retain staff,” Mahone says.

Aligning skillset and budget limitations is also a challenge, according to Pagan. “In these cases, offering a strong total rewards package – paired with a culture that prioritizes em-

ployee support, flexibility and growth – can be a compelling advantage,” she says.

Generationally speaking, Millennials and Gen Z are building strength in the workforce as Baby Boomers age out. “These cohorts prize flexibility, purpose-driven work and career development,” Mahone says. “Unfortunately, onsite work does not naturally lend itself to the level of desired flexibility, so employers are having to find other ways to compensate.”

Culture & Development

Company Culture

Company culture is one of the major players in talent recruitment and employee retention. Consistent programing and experiences can help build a singular brand with shared values and purpose. “This fosters trust, connection and a strong sense of belonging – regardless of where employees work,” Pagan says.

Habitat uses volunteer days to help build its teams and culture. “In a dispersed industry like multifamily, maintaining culture requires intentional, ongoing effort – and we’re proud of the foundation we’ve built,” she says.

“Despite having associates living in disparate regions across the Mid-Atlantic, Southeast and northern Midwest, our company fosters great culture by hosting and supporting company-wide initiatives,” Kadish says. These include mental health vacation days; summer vacation schedules; and company breakfasts, lunches and ice cream socials.

Company culture isn’t some far-off thought that comes around every so often, it is one of the foundations for many employers and employees.

“Employees need to feel seen, heard and appreciated,” Simon says. “Regular check-ins, team recognition and a culture that prioritizes transparency and purpose can help staff feel connected to their work. Even small things like celebrating wins or offering flexibility where possible go a long way. While most onsite roles can’t be fully remote, offering flexible shifts, compressed workweeks or

staggered schedules can help improve work-life balance.

“Offering free healthcare, reimbursed gym and cell phone costs, mental wellness resources, childcare stipends and commuter assistance have provided an additional leg up in obtaining and retaining associates,” Simon says.

Mahone adds, “Assuming that you get the basics right (pay, benefits, management, etc.), culture is the next important ingredient in employee retention.” Landmark believes three key factors strongly influence culture: Communication, connection and recognition. Every Monday, the company hosts a call where the team hears directly from leadership. Properties also host a daily standup: The Landmark Lineup to discuss important daily tasks. On every third Thursday of the month, properties take time away from the community to socialize. Top performers are also recognized on a monthly basis.

Career Development

Going beyond traditional employee benefits, some firms are taking talent growth to another level. “Investing in employees through programs like leadership development, mentorship and tuition reimbursement not only supports individual growth but also strengthens the organization’s succession planning efforts,” Pagan says. Employers can enhance and increase

long-term skills, retention and new opportunities for staff.

Every employee at Habitat participates in training to reinforce the company’s values and service standards. Other in-person and virtual events and offerings highlight team members’ skills, compliance and leadership development.

“Recruiting also needs a fresh approach. Building partnerships with local trade schools, community colleges or workforce development programs can help create a more reliable talent pipeline,” Simon says.

“Poor resident experiences reduce retention, which increases turnover costs and puts pressure on service and administrative teams to constantly backfill vacancies,” Simon says. These staffing gaps limit teams’ abilities to fully execute value-add strategies like resident events or maintaining curb appeal.

“From a leadership lens, when staff morale drops due to being overextended or unsupported, it contributes to further drive turnover, creating a costly and ongoing cycle,” he adds. “In short, a labor shortage doesn’t just affect how a property runs, it affects how it performs, how it’s perceived and how profitable it ultimately is. Solving the staffing challenge isn’t just an HR issue; it’s a core business imperative.”

Michael Miller is NAA's Managing Editor.