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Investing in employees is good business for Epilog Laser

BY LISA WIRTHMAN

SPECIAL TO THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

The accessibility of executives such as President and CEO Steve Garnier makes Epilog Laser a great place to build a long-term career for employee Zachary Steadman.

Steadman, a maintenance technician, began working part time for Epilog after high school to pay for his college courses. When he saw a strong business case for turning his job into a full-time position, Steadman was able to approach Garnier, who heard him out — then created the new job.

And when the demands of full-time employment caused Steadman to set aside school, Garnier not only encouraged him to go back to school, but also helps him study for calculus exams.

Epilog's company policy of paying 90 percent of tuition for classes where employees earn an "A" or "B" also helped make that education a reality, Steadman said.

Investing in employees is good business for the Golden-based manufacturer of laser tubes and laser engraving systems for commercial distributors, small businesses and hobbyists, said Mike Dean, vice president of sales and marketing.

The long-term relationships Epilog builds with employees are a model for the way the company expects its staff to treat customers, suppliers and distributors, he said.

Epilog's reputation for treating employees well also helps the company attract and keep highly skilled talent, Dean said. "A lot of our positions are filled with people who have deep experience in this business," he said.

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Epilog Laser

Industry: Laser engraving, cutting and marking

Top executive: Steve Garnier, president and CEO

Location: Golden

Established: 1988

No. of Employees: 88

Website: www.epiloglaser.com



That's important to Epilog, given that a single laser tube accounts for half the cost of an entire laser system. "When you have 50 percent of the cost of a system invested in a single part, it's pretty important to try and get it to work as well as it possibly can," Dean said.

Epilog is working on improvements to its laser systems that will increase the edge quality and speed of laser cuts by up to four times current capabilities, Dean said.

Epilog gives employees autonomy to operate in whatever way works best for each group. One production team chooses into come in at 6 a.m., for example, while another elects to come in at 7 a.m.

"We are not a very hierarchal company," Dean said. "We try and give [employees] clear direction and then get out of the way, and expect them to come up with the solutions that are going to work for them."

To keep employees happy and healthy, Epilog encourages exercise and recreation by providing a bike barn, showers



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Epilog Laser's employees often mountain bike and road bike at lunch. The office is located in Golden.

and lockers for employees, as well as organizing lunchtime soccer scrimmages and twice-weekly basketball games with Garnier.

Steadman often rides his mountain bike at lunch — a privilege that seems even more acceptable when his manager joins him for a ride, he said.

Epilog also funds 100 percent of medical insurance costs for individual employees, and all but \$50 a month for families. "It's one of our biggest perks," Dean said. The company also offers bonuses, a profit-sharing program and 401(k) matching for employees.

"Manufacturing as a whole is a difficult place to retain workers," Dean said. "A lot

of times the tasks, especially in production, can tend to be repetitive. We're lucky because we're always developing new stuff."

Epilog also is working hard to keep its products 100 percent American-made. "We think that Americans as a whole have a better manufacturing intellect than a lot of other countries," Dean said. "Americans really think deeply about creating new things, not just incrementally improving on existing things.

"The more innovation you have, the more innovation you're going to create. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy."

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