

INTERNAL INTERVIEWS



INTERNAL INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS — COMPANY CULTURE

It's more of a **family** thing than anything else.

Our culture is **personable**. It is **nurturing** to a certain extent, where we want and we strive to provide opportunities for everyone to grow professionally. And **friendly**, it's a friendly environment to work in.

We're what I like to describe as **a scrappy little company**. We all do what's necessary to bring business in.

Working here, **you are respected** and **your opinions matter** and they like to have your feedback and suggestions. Even though we're a small office, we work very well together.

It's very **free-spirited** here; we have a good time, crack up a lot, it's a really **positive company structure**.

We all work very well together. I think our goal is not necessarily to look out for ourselves, but to make sure that our customers are taken care of which will, in turn, reward us in the end.

INTERNAL INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS — GOING ABOVE AND BEYOND

I would like to think that **our service is far and above**. Accessibility, everyone knows how to get in touch with me. Nobody in the eastern part of North Carolina can ever say that they can't get me or anybody from [REDACTED] on the phone because we are there, and the phones are answered and we get questions and **we try to react to things in a timely manner**.

Our biggest competitive edge against our competitors? **It comes down to our responsiveness**. We try to be helpful and we try to be responsive. We answer all the calls, we answer all the emails, **we do whatever they need us to do to get the business**.

We do what has to be done. I've gone on site visits, I've climbed on ladders, I don't necessarily like to do that and that's not in my job description, but I do what I need to do to make the whole thing work, and certainly the people that have been here since I've been here feel the same way.

A lot of folks know that if they get [REDACTED] engaged in something, then **we're going to do whatever we can** to A) make the price work for the customer and B) make sure that everything goes smooth and that there's not going to be problems down the road, that they're not just going to get a price thrown out and not have any local support.

You want to make sure that you're giving the information as quick as possible. My main goal is I try to get all this tracking and shipping information to the customer **before they have to come to me and ask for it**.

INTERNAL INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS – IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIPS

This is a **people business**. It's building relationships, it's making sure you're getting that information to the person who's asking **quickly** and making sure that information is **accurate**.

Most of our business comes from our relationships with our distributors. They come to us for their end user.

You'll find that a term that gets thrown around a lot is "relationship" in this industry. You know, we have a relationship with X specifier, we have a relationship with X distributor. **This industry is built upon a lot of relationships around town.**

INTERNAL INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS — COMPANY NEEDS

Putting **structures and processes** in place would be my number one priority. We need **more people** to have a better outreach. We can't get more customers if we don't have the bandwidth to handle them. Like I said, we have projects out our ears, but we don't have the manpower to handle all of that. So I would say **structure, processes, more support and personnel**.

I would **build the specification side** of the business a little quicker and with a little more verve because I think that's the real future.

I'd give people more opportunities to go **outside their job description** and be exposed to more.

Maybe on the **technical side**, with regard to **equipment**. We continue to have computer issue and printing issues, and that's something I use all day long.

Long term, we definitely need some **more manufacturers**, we're **too reliant** upon one manufacturer right now, and we need to spread that out, which is well known, I don't think anyone would deny that.

More **business development style opportunities**... Taking specifiers or customers to educational-style trips to manufacturers and things of that nature, I think that goes a long way.

INTERNAL INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS — RELIABLE AND RESPONSIVE

What words would you use to describe [REDACTED]?



How old is [REDACTED]?

Mid 20s to early 40s

What are his/her hobbies?

Golf, Hunting, Fishing, the outdoors, Football, exercise, running, hiking, quality time with family

What kind of car do they drive?

A nice truck (maybe a Ford F-150) or a used SUV to carry samples in

What of party would they throw?

Backyard Barbecue (pig picking), a dinner party at a steakhouse, celebratory drinks at a local brewery (like Olde Mecklenburg), a Super Bowl party at their house

INTERNAL INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS- SUMMARY

Overall: Close-knit group of hardworking individuals

Key differentiators:

- Small company of employees that enjoy working together.
- Employees are willing to put in the work to get things done. They take pride in going far and above (delivering in a timely manner, being on-site, answering questions quickly & accurately)
- There's a focus on building the relationship rather than relying on the name recognition of a product.
- Solid core of expertise in the lighting industry.

Key opportunity areas (as seen by current employees):

- **Personnel:** having more people to go out and bring in business
- **Structure/Process:** a uniform way to produce a quote, move a job through the company, etc.
- **More Lines:** offer more lines to decrease reliance on one manufacturer and make up for not having a "name brand."
- **Business development:** More education about products for customers as well as more communication about products from manufacturer to customer.

INTERNAL INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS RELATED TO THE COMPETITION

██████████ is a large rep. agency. They are **larger** than we are. They've been **established** a lot longer than we have. They have a **larger line cart** than we do. They have **more employees** than we do.

██████████ has Acuity, and if you've been in this industry long enough, **Acuity is the biggest lighting brand out there**, so when you have to go against them, it's hard when you don't have a direct match to a lot of that

They have quite an **extensive social media platform**, they have a **great website**. It's the first thing that pops up when you google "Lighting in Charlotte." They're out there... ██████████ **seems more established** in the industry. They look **more polished**.

INTERNAL INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS RELATED TO THE COMPETITION

KB Stevens is the Acuity representative, so they're the Kleenex representatives. Acuity, in our industry, is equivalent to what Kleenex is... The only other thing I would say about [REDACTED] is that they've been around for a long time, and they've had that line, which used to be called Lithonia for a long, long time, so **they are a name recognition company.**

They're a little **more uniform** when it comes to their overall brand. When they quote things, they have a 'quotes tool' and a quotes format, a little bit neater, but that's just because we're a smaller company and we're growing, and we're in the process of getting those same forms and the same type of branding. Overall, they're similar to us.

Our company is more customer-driven, we've got to get our name out there somehow. Their name's already out there, so they know people are going to come to them. But they're **not the most responsive. They don't try as hard.**

They've been around for a long time, so a lot of the engineers default to using their stuff. I think they do a relatively good job servicing people and orders and things like that, but **I don't think people personally like them as well**, but they do a good job with what they do.

INTERNAL INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS RELATED TO THE COMPETITION

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] has been an **established** lighting representative in the area, they're out of Durham, but they've been in the market for a long time. They've always had a lot of large lines.

They're the **Hubbell** agents. Hubble is not as much of a competitor as I think they are. I guess because I hardly ever see them specified.

They're a **small group** like us, but I think they're the Cooper rep, which is another big lighting conglomerate, it's just not as big as Acuity.

The guy that runs Team used to work in distribution, so he knows the distributors pretty well. I think a lot of their stuff is largely **driven by price**, they tend to have **good pricing** so people go to them for price purposes.

INTERNAL INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS RELATED TO THE COMPETITION

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It used to be █, but now the original owner sold it and opened their own business called █, so now that company is really just called █... I'm not really familiar with their personnel, so the only thing I can really say about █ is that **name recognition is their really big thing.**

They're **Cooper agent** that is in town, █. I don't think they're as well liked, but they're still there.

They only do business with a few customers across the state and they do a lot of business with those customers... They're the **least favorite company** in the state.

INTERNAL INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS RELATED TO THE COMPETITION

In General

It's kind of like trying to sell an off-brand type of Kleenex or tissue, but people know it as Kleenex. If someone says I want some Kleenex, they go to [the Kleenex Rep], even though any tissue would really do... Our customer knows of that product and that it was specified and they don't want to take any chances with trying to get something else approved that is similar.

Unfortunately, price drives a lot, but it's not all about price. I know that people come to me and will lead me to a price so that they can buy from our company as opposed to dealing with others.

That's the biggest question: What differentiates us from companies A, B and C? And, I don't have a really good answer for that right now.

There are projects that we just can't bid. It's like I'm looking at one today, one of my engineer friends sent me a project and I could do about 60% of it. I really want to do the whole thing for him, but I just don't have the products... and our main competitors could put this project out without very much problem.

INTERNAL INTERVIEW HIGHLIGHTS RELATED TO THE COMPETITION

Marketing and Branding

We have absolutely zero marketing. It was nonexistent before even I showed up, and I showed up and it's still nonexistent. So, these are the type of things that can elevate a company and it can also provide guidance for a company.

Products

Right now we need more specialty product line. I think our weakness, if we have one, is that we're not able to sell out specification fully. So, we need more products to represent.

Our lines (depth) is our biggest weakness. We don't have a conglomerate like Hubbell Lighting or Acuity, or Cooper Lighting which can cover everything you can think of. We've got 40 or 50 lines that we can pull from.

Access

I would say again, like with Acuity, the access that the customers have to shipping information and things like that. That's something that we can't necessarily offer, our manufacturers have to offer it, but it would be nice to have more of an online presence from some of our manufacturers that people could check orders. We used to have that with Juno, but we really don't have that from any of our manufacturers right now.

Personnel

People are very expensive. And I think you have to be ready to expand... It's kind of a catch-22, you get the lines, or you get the people that help you get the lines. So, it's one of those things I think you have to balance correctly.