



## Building Your Team's Bench Strength: Tenant Coordination Staff Selection and Development

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**F**ielding the right tenant coordination (TC) team has become increasingly critical to success in retail development and redevelopment projects. A strong TC team ensures a consistent level of tenant construction and design quality and facilitates team communication and problem resolution. Perhaps most important, a good TC team makes sure that all deals meet milestone dates and the coordinated grand opening date.

Creating a good tenant coordination team—one that can succeed in all these functions—requires thoughtful staffing and development.

### Team Skills and Qualifications

Every tenant coordination team should have a balance of design and technical strengths. All members bring unique skills but must have several essential capabilities. These include the ability to:

- Communicate well, understand the views of others and effectively express personal and team perspectives
- Organize and prioritize work
- Perform under pressure
- Adapt to and manage change, a constant aspect of tenant coordination work
- Be decisive yet flexible, acting with confidence while maintaining an open mind
- Work effectively with and as a team, setting aside individual ego and cooperating with many different types of people; focusing on team vs. individual accomplishment

Whether working in a central corporate department or field office, every tenant coordination team should also include the following key professional skills:

- Strong design sense
- Superior technical knowledge
- CAD expertise
- Leadership skills
- Administrative skills with strong computer literacy and exceptional organizational strengths

Depending on size and budget constraints, one person might need to bring several or even all of these strengths to the team. Industry opinion is mixed on whether tenant coordinators should have architectural degrees, design backgrounds, or construction backgrounds. Each company and its tenant coordination leader or supervising executive should answer this question based on project needs. A combination of both architectural design and field construction experience may be the best formula for successfully managing the entire TC process.

### **Finding the Right Team Members**

Before beginning the process of interviewing candidates for a tenant coordination role, the team leader or supervising executive should develop a very specific job description. The description should detail the responsibilities of the role, specify the qualifications needed to fulfill those responsibilities (including years of relevant experience), and identify expected work hours, potential for overtime, and expected project duration (if hiring for a project-specific role).

Example responsibilities for an on-site tenant coordination team member include:

- Create architectural, engineering and design criteria
- Create a building code informational brochure for tenants' designers
- Establish and maintain contact with all tenant architects and designers
- Review feasibility of all tenant space reconfigurations
- Meet with community officials to establish tenant permitting procedures
- Monitor the progress of each tenant deal; troubleshoot potential problems; sensitively resolve design and construction issues
- Coordinate and conduct regular status meetings with project leasing, legal, and development teams, as well as with project management, marketing and security teams
- Coordinate necessary inspections
- Create detailed punch lists for tenants with work nearing completion
- Process tenant allowances

To identify potential candidates for a tenant coordination job, the team leader or supervisor should explore personal and business networks as well as posting the position on appropriate job search Web sites. Existing employees interested in assuming more responsibility or taking on a different challenge can bring attractive organizational experience to the role.

Candidate expectations are as important, if not more so, than prior experience. For example, a recently degreed architect passionate about pursuing a design career may be frustrated in a tenant coordination role, with only design review responsibilities but limited opportunities for design influence. During the interview process, the team leader should review the position description in detail with interested candidates.

The candidate interview is a primary opportunity to explore qualities that are difficult to assess on a resume, such as a talent for teamwork. Can the candidate describe a specific incident in which he or she worked as a member of a team to accomplish a particular goal? How did he or she work with others? Were there people on the team who were difficult to work with? How did the candidate handle those people?

References are a final and important candidate assessment step. Rather than personal references, a candidate's previous supervisors or professors are the most reliable source of first-hand observations about the individual's dependability, initiative and attitude toward others.

### **Team Member Training and Development**

New team members need a solid initial orientation and subsequent on-the-job observation and training—ideally conducted by the team leader or an experienced supervisor. Essential initial information includes a thorough discussion of:

- The tenant coordination team's mission and goals
- The entire organizational structure, along with individual introductions to co-workers with whom the new team member will work
- The structure of a real estate deal and the points at which the tenant coordinator's role can impact the success of the negotiation
- The coordinator's specific job description and job responsibilities
- Work process and flow, including standard forms of communication
- Philosophy and policy on sending and responding to communications: email, voice mail, cell phones, written correspondence, etc.

During his or her first six weeks, the new TC team member should attend as many meetings and interactions as possible as an observer, with the team leader or supervisor participating. A five- or ten-minute follow-up after the meeting allows the team leader to explain any nuances of the deal or business relationships and address any questions the new team member might have.

During a new team member's first six months, the team leader or supervisor should ideally attend all meetings in which the new tenant coordinator is required to report. In these meetings, the team leader should provide clarification or support as needed but let the coordinator take the primary role.

On an ongoing basis, the best way to nurture a new employee is through frequent and open communication. The team leader or supervisor should make time for a weekly face-to-face discussion, probing for more information from the team member, if necessary. Can the new team member share a recent story about interactions with a tenant, tenant architect or tenant contractor? Can the team member think of recent situations in which he or she had to be decisive, flexible, or both? Has the team member been able to support the team's mission and goals with particular actions?

Thoughtful selection and development of individual TC team members will provide the "bench strength" necessary to bring any project to a successful close: a timely and complete grand opening.

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