



2015 JESSE H. NEAL
AWARD WINNER



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Making the Cut

This month we profile Neal Communities, *Professional Builder's* 2015 Builder of the Year. During the downturn, this builder didn't just survive—it thrived. When we traveled to Florida to see Neal, editorial director Denise Dersin, senior editor Mike Beirne, and I met with folks throughout the company: sales, human resources, operations, design, marketing, land acquisition, financial, and purchasing. We talked to top managers and project superintendents. We toured model homes and the design center. We talked to new employees and long-timers alike.

Everyone impressed us with smarts, talent, and ambition. But there was something else: A pervasive vibe of people doing and enjoying work they're well-suited for—a good fit, the right match. It's no coincidence: Owner Pat Neal is involved in every hire, says Southwest Florida regional president Michael Greenberg, an industry veteran who contends that such deep involvement from the top is unique to Neal Communities. Greenberg's own interview process lasted two months, with both sides carefully checking each other out.

Taking time. Interviewing with Neal involves at least eight steps, says Tashara Cronshaw, the company's director of human resources: looking at a candidate's résumé; having managers review it; a prescreening phone interview; a personality profile; and in-person interviews with the hiring manager, team members, HR, and with owner Pat Neal and president Michael Storey. Sometimes there's even a follow-up interview. Why go to all that trouble? "This is a family business that has been around for over 45 years," Cronshaw says. "We're a family-oriented, team-oriented culture."

Personality testing. Questions on decision making, productivity, and multitasking reveal a candidate's style of working. Neal's test includes questions about how you'd describe yourself and how others would describe you.

Precise interviewing. Cronshaw asks questions such as, "Tell me about the management style that brings out your best efforts," "What one word describes you most accurately?" and "What irritates you about other people and how do you deal with it?" A favorite is, "How do you rely on others to make you better?" (An answer of "I don't," is good info, Cronshaw says.)

Neal Communities wants people looking for a place to grow their careers. Of talented candidates who aren't a match for the job they've applied for, "Nobody qualified gets stuck in a black hole," Cronshaw says. It's a candidate-driven market right now, and Neal draws top employees by investing in the development of every one of them. As you'll see, it shows.

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Rigorous interviewing promotes a culture of excellence and growth.