



# Hire and Retain Staff in a Booming Economy

By David Castlegrant





For the better part of the past year, almost all service related businesses (retail, restaurants, distribution, etc.) have been experiencing a hiring crisis unlike any in recent memory. With unemployment at an 18-year low, people are not bothering to apply for job openings at many businesses. Nationwide, this is even more prevalent with service industries jobs that are paying less than \$15.00/hour. Many companies are having to rethink their existing recruitment plans that worked in the past when it wasn't a job seekers market. Companies are also having to become more creative to keep good employees once they find them.

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### **Have a recruitment plan**

Like any other aspect of business, it is important to have a plan before you begin to look for that seemingly elusive help. Let's start with the first step: Do you have job descriptions for your staff? The job description is important because it outlines the duties, responsibilities, span of control, work environment, physical requirements, educational level, chain of command and pay structure.



It is important to craft job descriptions for all positions within your business because these tell a story of how the work gets done and who does it. Job descriptions are also important for the recruitment plan because they provide the information for the help wanted ad.

Ideally, a recruitment plan is used when the company is planning for future additions to staff. Unfortunately, most small businesses routinely find themselves blindsided when their employees give their notice or simply stop showing up for work. With this more common scenario in mind, it is important that the recruitment plan include emergency contingents so that it can be launched swiftly and efficiently.



### **What are you paying for this job?**

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the pay for the average retail store help position is \$10.47/hour. If you are having a difficult time recruiting, or if you cannot retain good employees, you will need to research how your starting wages stack up against other similar companies in your marketplace. With a robust economy, employers are competing for employees at all levels of the business. If your starting wage is under the average, raise it. This

may come as a shock to the more frugal business owner, but if you want to stabilize your store operation, open your wallet and at least pay the prevailing wage in your area or continue to suffer the consequences of poor customer service, loss prevention gaps, a store to do list that never gets touched and increased headaches and backaches for store owners.

### **Where do I find help?**

In days gone by, the most frequently used methods for communicating help wanted needs were the classified pages in the local newspaper and the community network: high schools, community colleges, religious organizations, civic groups, etc. While these still work, there are additional platforms that can be used to get the word out that you are hiring.

### **Social Media**

If your business has a Facebook or LinkedIn page, you can utilize them for letting other users know that your business has a job opening. Both platforms are good for sharing and forwarding information so others can help you get the word out. Although both of these sources have a pay for service, using them can improve your chances of a viable job candidate.

Use your company website and email announcements for jobs as they become available. Sometimes your best candidates may be customers who are already familiar with your business. Never underestimate the networking capabilities of your customers, either. Almost everyone you come in contact with always knows of someone who is looking for a new job opportunity.

A recent study by Pew Research concluded that three out of five workers are seeking job opportunities online. Services such as Indeed and Craigslist can work; however, there is a cost associated with both sites. The aforementioned job sites are far less expensive than Monster, Career Builders, or Zip Recruiters which would be better utilized if you needed to look for managerial, technical, or administrative staff. Most community colleges and state unemployment offices also have job posting boards that are free to employers.





## The job Interview

Once you begin receiving resumes, sort through these and pick the ones that contain two things: (1) job responsibilities that are a close match to the job description or, at least the information you included in your want ad; and, (2) stability—how long does the candidate tend to stay at a job? Job hopping is commonplace in today's economy, but don't hire a job hopper. Look for candidates that are staying at a job for two years plus.

Keep the interview questions open ended. After a few get-to-know-you questions and a summary of what the job duties of the position require, use some of these more thought-provoking ones to fuel the conversation:

Can you tell us something about what you learned about our company?

What were the responsibilities of your last position?

How do your qualifications fit with the job we're offering?

What kind of people frustrate you?

How do you resolve conflict?  
Can you give me an example?

Please give me a job description of the position for which you are interviewing.

After you say: "You're Hired," you need to try keep them that way! Retention must be taken as seriously as the hiring process or a vicious cycle will ensue. As the business owner or manager, what is your work environment like? Is it open, friendly, helpful, encouraging, knowledge enhancing? Or is the environment more negative, even toxic? No new employee starts a job in order to fail. However, most new employees fail because the owner/manager didn't live up to their end of the deal by providing the new employee



with a modicum of training, some patience, and a simple thank you. If you can create a positive environment for new hires, it can build to more employee participation, ideas for improvement, and an atmosphere where the "stuff" that makes employee motivation happen.

It takes much time, energy, effort and cost to hire an employee. Having a well-planned and executed recruitment strategy and taking some time to train and motivate these new employees will give you a much better chance at yielding positive results: an employee who is invested in your business and will stick with you for years to come.

*David Castlegrant has extensive work experience as an executive retail operations manager, university professor and business consultant. Over 200 organizations have been served since the establishment of David Castlegrant & Associates in 1992.*