

Staff Matters Hire Smart - Hire Right

Does hiring a new employee stress you out? If so, you're pretty typical. As a small business owner, it can be pretty tough to compete with the big organizations for the best and brightest candidates. You may not feel that you can offer what a good employee will want, but there are many people who prefer to work for small businesses, based on environment, job challenge and organizational culture.

To ensure that there is a match between what your company has to offer and what the employee is looking for, there are several good HR practices that you should follow. This article will assist you in implementing a sound process for successfully recruiting qualified employees for your business. Before your new employee even gets in the door, there are ways that you can reduce the risk of not hiring the right person for the job, for the organization and for you.

There are four basic steps for recruitment and hiring:

1. Employment Advertising

Before you advertise for the position make sure you understand the law. The B.C. Human Rights Code prohibits discrimination in employment advertisement. The part you need to pay attention to is Section 11 of the Code which states "A person must not publish or cause to be published an advertisement in connection with employment or prospective employment that expresses a limitation, specification or preference as to race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation or age unless the limitation, specification or preference is based on a bona fide occupational requirement."

Wow, what a mouthful, but definitely words to adhere to when it comes to advertising for a position, whether it is part-time, full-time, contract or otherwise. So before you publish your advertisement, make sure you have not discriminated in any way. For example, when advertising for a position, you cannot say something like, "Looking for person under 30 years old for heavy lifting position." The heavy lifting might be a bona fide occupational requirement (needed to do the job) but you can't discriminate against someone's age!

A good idea is to check online at <http://www.ag.gov.bc.ca/human-rights-protection> for any information you may require. You can also get a legal opinion from a lawyer who specializes in labour law, but that can be a costly alternative. Another choice is to contact your local Human Resources Management Association for a list of Consultants who can provide expertise and guidance.

2. Application Forms

If you use application forms instead of accepting resumes and cover letters you need to walk a very fine line in order to stay on the right side of human rights legislation and privacy. You may ask for a candidate's address, phone number and employment history but stay away from any of the discriminatory areas quoted above from Section 11 of the Human Rights Code. You can still get the information you require. You just need to know how to ask. For instance, instead of asking "Do you have daycare arrangements for your children?" you can ask, "Are you available to work days, nights, weekends or shifts." And then have them check off the boxes that they are available to work. Examples of application

forms can be found on the internet, but make sure to only gather the information that is required for the job the person will be asked to perform.

3. Interviewing

After you have chosen which applicants you would like to hire (following all the proper practices outlined above, and based on the requirement skills needed for the position), you can start the interview process. Again, you need to make sure that the questions you are asking are related to the position, so that you can determine the candidate's suitability. No questions about age, marital status, religion, physical or mental disabilities should be asked.

For example, when giving an interview, many employers want to keep things informal and pleasant for the candidate and can veer off track and start asking about things like, "How many kids do you have?" or, "How does your spouse feel about you working?" Innocent questions like these can get you into a heap of trouble, if the candidate feels they have not been considered for the job based on their personal circumstances.

Interviewing does take some practice, and a lot of people get caught in the "people like to hire people like themselves" syndrome. Just because someone has the same skills that you do, doesn't mean they are right for the job you are hiring for. Most small business owners that hire successfully, do so because they have hired people with skill sets that are a compliment to theirs, so that essential competency gaps are filled. If you love sales and marketing, but are weak in areas of administration and bookkeeping, hire someone who can take over those tasks for you. If you give that person those responsibilities, make sure that they know that you trust them to get the job done, once you have provided the proper training and guidance to get them on their way.

Another way to increase your chances of hiring the right person is to hire for "fit". Fit basically means; does the person have the values, beliefs and goals that are a match to you and your business. Will the candidate fit in well with you, your existing employees, and customers?

Lisa McIntosh of Urban Harvest Organic Delivery in Kelowna says, "We are a very small business, with just 7 part-time employees, and a very informal management structure, so our hiring and training processes are very simple. We do have a strong record of retention given the part-time nature of our business though, and I think this has to do with the soft benefits of working at Urban Harvest – particularly the alignment with personal values. (We have one employee, for example, who has finished his teaching degree and become a teacher while working at Urban Harvest, and he continues to work one day a week, because he feels a strong connection to our philosophy and the people he works with at Urban Harvest!) We always find out what working at Urban Harvest means to a new employee – if they are personally connected to the social and environmental values inherent in what we do, they are much more likely to stay with us and enjoy their work."

During an interview you should probe to find out a bit about their personality type and whether they are social, driven, or process oriented? What kind of attitude does the person have, and what is their customer service philosophy? Do they have good conflict resolution skills, along with technical skills such as organization, planning, computer proficiency and leadership? This will give you a balance of both soft and hard skills required for the job and the culture of your organization. Great examples of interview questions can be found at <http://www.ucalgary.ca/careerservices/samplebehavioralinterviewquestions>. This is just one of many good websites that can give you example questions to suit your needs.

4. Reference Checking

The new privacy law requires that candidates give you permission to check their references so you always need to let them know that you intend to contact the previous employers they have supplied. Your obligation as an employer is to also let them know what the information will be used for and who it will be disclosed to. Once again, it is very important to only ask questions that are applicable to the job and the candidate's skills, and not discriminatory in any way. Ask questions regarding the quality of their work,

their ability to get along with others in the workplace and their ability to learn new tasks. Most importantly, ask the referee if he or she would hire this person again. That one simple question can cover a lot of ground.

To ensure you have the candidate's permission to contact their references, you can have a sign off area on your application form. If you don't use application forms, simply have them sign a disclosure form at the interview, if you want to pursue this next step with them.

These four steps are critical to ensure you have followed obligatory employment practices during the hiring stage. By following them, you are also giving your prospective employees the assurance that you are an employer that cares about their rights, building trust and respect at the very beginning of the employment relationship.

Women's Enterprise Centre is the go-to place for BC women business owners for business loans, skills training, business advisory services, resources, publications and referrals. Call us at 1.800.643.7014 or email info@womensenterprise.ca from anywhere in BC.