

Tools for the Toolbox: Hire Right the First Time

By Debbie Graham

Small business owners are usually good at technical operations but often have trouble hiring employees. Some simple tools will help you find the right person to fill the job the first time.

First, write a job description. Describe the essential job functions in order of importance. Include occasional as well as regular day-to-day tasks. Be brief and get to the point using action words. Focus on the job function instead of the way to do it. To hire a secretary, list functions such as answers telephone and routes calls or takes accurate messages for callback; greets visitors and performs customer service function; opens and distributes daily mail; composes and types correspondence using computer software; makes copies; manages general files and records; and other duties as assigned.

After you have outlined the functions, finalize the job description to make it clear what you expect the person to do. Then prepare a good job application that will provide immediate answers to questions you will otherwise have to ask in each interview. When filling a secretarial position, you need to know about technical skills such as typing speed, proficiency in computer software, and experience in different equipment. A focused job application

will help you save time and sort through the applicants equitably.

After application review, set up interviews with your top candidates. Prepare an introduction of your company mission, goals, and philosophy to give good background information. Discuss the candidate's application in detail to be sure their information is accurate. Review the job description and the role it plays in the overall operation of the company.

As an interviewer, you don't want to do all the talking. Ask in-depth questions that will give you the information you need to evaluate the candidate's experience. Be sure to ask open-ended questions that require more than a yes or no answer, such as "tell me about your best achievement at work," and "what are your strengths." Ask them hard questions such as "how would you handle this situation" and set up a real life scenario to show how they react to complicated issues.

For most jobs, skills testing is a good idea to prove stated abilities. In this secretarial example, a simple test requiring creation and completion of a short letter using software listed on the job description and timed for each applicant will demonstrate flexibility, handling simple tasks under stress, creative ability, and the capability to get the job done. This simple test becomes

part of their application and will help you choose your best candidate.

Take good notes during each interview and explain that you check references. Have them sign an authorization to check their background and credit if it is not already on your application.

A good way to keep up with your candidates during the interview process is a master ranking sheet. A simple grid with areas of evaluation across the top and names down the left margin will allow you to numerically rank the candidates in each category. The grid minimizes overlooking strengths or weaknesses and gives everyone a fair chance of evaluation. Over several days of interviews, the grid is a straightforward way to review all of the candidates and their abilities.

Once your top candidate has accepted the position, reply to all the applicants explaining the position is filled. If your new employee has cold feet and changes his mind, it will make calling the next best candidate a little easier.

Set up a checklist for the new employee's first day. Include introductions to contacts, a tour of the facility with a special focus on the employee's work area, a general operations review, and explain benefits such as leave, insurance, and

emergency procedures. Have the proper paperwork ready to complete, and set aside time to make the employee feel welcome. A well-managed first day will help to develop a loyal, long-term employee.

Business Sense



Setting up the tools to hire smart with your job description, application, skills testing, interviews, evaluations, reference and background checks, and a checklist for the employee's first day will save money in time and resources as you hire right the first time.

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