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Wednesday, February 04, 2009

What You Need to Know About Hiring for a Small Business

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By Kathryn Buschman Vasel
FOXBusiness

For a small-business owner, hiring that first employee is a momentous occasion. It means you're expanding and need help to ensure your business continues to flourish.

And with layoffs coming in every direction from big corporations the talent pool is growing rapidly. In July 2008, small-business employment surged 0.2% the sharpest rate that year, according to SurePayroll, a Chicago-based small-business payroll firm.

More than 1,800 small businesses start each day, according to Rich Jaeckle, chairman of SCORE Orlando, and nearly 26 million businesses are scattered across the country.

Before hiring, it's a good idea to see if a freelancer or outsourcing the work would suffice. But if you need someone in house it's time to start employee hunting to find the right people to help expand your dream.

Rick Rahim, owner of five pet-sitting companies in the greater Washington, D.C. area, hired close to 40 employees in the last year and has a simple approach to attracting people. Rahim posts a simple advertisement that only includes the name of the business, the hourly rate, the slogan "smart people wanted," and a telephone number for people to call for more information.

"I spend a lot of time researching what motivates people and at the end of the day the first thing people use to determine if they are interested in a job is the pay," said Rahim, who is president of BusinessVentures.com said.

In the message, Rahim provides all the nitty-gritty details of the job letting people know if it's something they would be interested in doing.

"It's a red flag when people ask questions that were covered in that message," he said. "Our clients trust them with their pets, home keys and security codes, and if they can't pay attention to details, that might not be a good fit for us."

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Here are four tips to follow when looking to expand your employee head count.

Pore Over the Resume

Before bringing in candidates to interview, make a list of 10 buzz words that are important to your small business. They can range from "fast-paced" to "money-making" then and be on alert for resumes that use identical or similar words.

While resumes start to blur together after you've read a couple dozen, it's important to pick up any nuances a candidate provides. According to Jaeckle, phrases like "I've served as a mentor," "I trained people" are signs of a team player and show loyalty.

"Loyalty is everything for a small business, you can't afford to lose employees," he said.

Rahim also pays particular attention to how long a candidate stays at previous jobs. "The biggest tell in the world is longevity at a previous job, if someone has had six jobs in two years, that is a definite red flag. While Rahim wouldn't write that person off, he would be sure to ask the reason for job-hopping and follow up with the past employers.

Outline Specific Guidelines

Be as upfront as possible about company policies and benefits to any potential employees to make sure requirements are clear to avoid any misunderstandings in the future.

Be ready to hand a candidate a list of start and end times, vacation policies, salary and salary levels or hourly rates and rates, said Jaeckle.

He also suggested that you write a blurb on advancement opportunities and plans, and any benefits – such as a 401(k) or health care.

"When people see the requirements they can weed themselves out if they know they can't make the commitment or need more money, saving you the trouble of losing them later on," said Jaeckle.

A Good Friend Doesn't Mean a Good Employee

Steer clear of hiring a friend or relative, advised Jaeckle.

"They have a tendency to take advantage of you and don't always have the best interest of the business in mind and might not be as productive as someone off the street," he said.

It's also important you look for employees that have that entrepreneurial spirit.

Make sure the person is a self-starter with a strong work ethic. People used to working in a corporate setting are used to having a team of workers to rely on to finish a project, and that isn't the case with most small businesses. Employers need someone who is self-sufficient who doesn't require a lot of supervision.

Ask the Right Questions

Rahim likes to let candidates take the lead at the beginning of an interview to get a feel for their personalities and whether they will mesh well with his team.

He is also on lookout to make sure the candidates asks meaningful questions that shows they did research.

Jaeckle stressed the importance of asking the right questions to gain insight of a person's work ethic.

SCORE Orlando hands out a list of questions to employers that includes "How good of an organizer are you?," "How do you feel about other people?," and "Can you make decisions?"

"A small business is, well, small – everything you do you will be noticed, and they have to fit in and be liked, and if you aren't liked its going to come out very quickly and that's not good," said Jaeckle.

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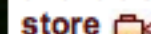
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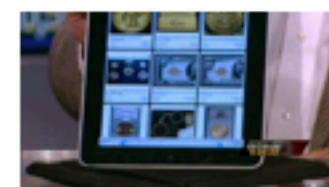


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