

How to Find and Keep Your Employees

Competition for employees has never been so acute in the hotel and restaurant industry, but operators can do some simple things to find and keep workers.

Figures show that 9.5 million people work in the hospitality industry and 37 percent of adults at some point have worked in the business. What that shows us is we don't have a real problem getting folks to work in the restaurant industry, we have a problem getting them to stay in the industry. It's a people business and it's tough finding people out there. It's a challenge, and it is probably not going to get much better.

You are not competing with just restaurant people. You are competing with everyone else out there in the world.

Innovative ways to find workers, to improve their skills and to keep them:

- Try a local employment agency. Many program now offer training credits of up to \$3,000.
- Consider using an Executive Search firm to provide a qualified short list of key senior position candidates.
- Use multi-tiered advertising to attract potential employees. Besides the local, broad-circulation newspaper using smaller metro-area papers and college newspapers, cable television, cooperative dire mail with marketing departments and Internet job-finding services for university student.
- Institute a bounty program. "Reward existing people for bringing in new employees." Adding that the program should be used intermittently, not all the time, in short bursts with generous gifts. Give people the incentive to go out and do something.
- Encourage your mangers to eliminate hiring stereotypes. One of the biggest opportunities is the age group 55 to 70. It's growing while the 16 to 21 group is shrinking. Recommend developing alliances with such groups as the Association for Retarded Citizens, which has job coaches for its members.
- Involve key employees in the interview and selection process. It develops a beneficial mentoring relationship and gives the existing employees a sense of ownership.
- Conduct structured interviews. That let's people be thorough and consistent.
- Test people. That is important, particularly at the management level.
- Be flexible with scheduling to keep good employees.
- Do a detailed orientation with a new employee. The first day is the key to happiness in the job.

- Start a “Welcome Wagon” for new employees. Bring them into the social fold of the business. If their friends work there, they will want to stay a lot longer. Friendly veteran employees can take snapshots of the new employees and introduce them to the informal structure.
- Train certified trainers. They will be more dedicated and do a better job.
- Create a salary administration plan. The process has to be detailed and regular. Set criteria, such as sales. Make employee retention part of a manager’s compensation plan.
- Conduct regular performance appraisals and do them on time using job description as basis.
- Survey your employee’s attitudes to see how happy or unhappy they are.
- Institute exit surveys to discover what the problems are. Doing so also allows you to leave the door open for the worker to return if new job doesn’t work out.
- Reduce frustrations for employees. The “mosquito bites” of air conditioning not working and items being out of stock make the job more difficult.
- Terminate problem employees. Try your best to help people work efficiently, but if you can’t, cut the losses.
- Provide quality of life initiatives. Uno provides five-day workweeks for managers followed by four day workweeks to provide better time off. We have to be aggressive. General Managers get prime holidays off.
- Create longevity programs. Uno puts in benefit tiers tied to longevity, including stock grants, vacation bonuses and leased cars. It’s hard to walk away.
- Provide life-long learning as well as business literacy training.
- Promote from within.
- Honor employees with recognition programs. More than anything else, people want to feel appreciated for a job well done.
- Set goals for workers and measure performance.
- Make work fun. The more you can celebrate successes, the more you make work fun. The more you can engage people socially at work, the more likely they are to stay with you.