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We Need More Staff!

What's the most important question to ask?

Everyone seems to be looking for staff. Recently my wife and I attended our favorite restaurant and found they were closed for lunch. We happened to meet the owner who explained *"We can’t open for lunch. We just don't have enough staff.”*

This situation produces an urgency to hire someone – almost anyone. But is almost anyone good enough?

In the bid to get staff, there are two questions that must be considered:

* **Of all the jobs available, why should someone work for us?**
* **What's the cost to us if we get it wrong?**

As a prospective employer, it's a good idea to put yourself in the shoes of an applicant. The question they will be asking is "*What's better about this job than others that are available?*" The shrewd business owner or hiring manager will have worked out a good answer to this. And if you don't have a good answer, you have a lot of work to do!

You have to think creatively and design jobs more flexibly.

"*Well, we'll pay more than our competition will*". This is an often-quoted sentiment, but very shortsighted. Money is an excellent way to get someone to move from one job to another. It's a terrible way to keep staff.

In these COVID times, what staff most want is flexibility. They want to be able to have a meaningful job but also have a life. Here are some things that you can do (and they don't cost very much of all):

1. **Be the boss that you that you always wished you had**.
* That means being fair.
* Treat people with basic respect and kindness
* Communicate to people what they need to know and avoid being the holder of "secret knowledge"
* Insist that people take their leave. When on holiday, don't bother them with work.
1. **Find out what the most important psychological rewards people seek from work, and meet these**.
* Ask prospective employees "*When you're looking at a job, how can you tell that it will be most satisfying for you?”*
* Then ask "*How can you tell – in your heart of hearts – that you have this*?"

Each person will have a unique answer. Write it down! Then make sure you do everything you can to deliver on this.

* One executive answered this question by saying "*When my boss tells me in writing that I've done a good job."*

I later learned that when he got such a letter he framed it and put it on his office wall. This had enormous psychological meaning to him. Just telling him he did a good job would not have had the same impact.

3**. Rather than tell people what hours they must work, consider what hours the person would like to work,** and try and build your roster around that. (Sounds easy I know. Sometimes not possible. Yet, you'd be surprised what some creative thinking can do.)

4**. Keeping meetings to a minimum**. Make sure whoever is running the meeting knows how to focus the discussion and achieve specific outcomes.

* One of the biggest complaints of staff is that they waste a lot of time in unnecessary meetings.
* Only have people in the meeting because they have to be there.
* Structure the meeting so that if only one part pertains to specific staff, let them leave once this is over.
* If the meeting is just to give out information, find a more efficient way to do it.

5. Last, and most important, let people know they are valued. **Let them know that having then on your team makes a difference to you personally.**

* In trying to illustrate this once in a training seminar on how to hire staff. I chose someone at random and said "*Assume your boss said to you ‘Betty, it means so much to me to know that you are on our team. I know I can always count on you to look after our customers and do everything you can to get the right result for them’*".
* To my great surprise, this woman began to cry. It was clear that she had been longing for this kind of acknowledgement from her boss, and despite many years of service, had never received it.
* This type of personal acknowledgement, offered genuinely, gracefully and judiciously, will get people to walk over hot coals for you.

**What will it cost if we hire the wrong person?**

Researchers have been trying to answer this question for many years. It's impossible to provide a precise figure. Each organization is different, each role has different responsibilities, and the level of damage than one person can do ranges from minimal to disastrous.

Based on over 40 years experience, as closely as I can tell, having someone on your staff for six to twelve months and then firing them will cost two to six times their annual wage. That means if you're paying someone $50,000, it will cost you between 100,000 and 200,000 to part company. This is of course only an estimate. Maybe it's slightly wrong. Whatever the real number is, it's a lot more than you think.

**Consider what you have invested:**

* All of the time and energy in crafting a job description, advertising, sorting through resumes, holding interviews, meeting to discuss the pros and cons of candidates and trying to come to a final decision.
* Time training the new person.
* Now consider the impact on customers and your staff by a poorly selected person. The culture you have been trying to build gets eroded. Staff become unhappy, and you may never hear about it. Most importantly, customers become disgruntled and only very few will tell you.
* **Most expensive of all is the opportunity cost**. Where would your business be if you hired an average performer who did the job competently without causing problems? Instead, you have had to fire someone (perhaps with payouts or legal costs) and then go back and start over again.

There are several lessons here:

1. Hire slowly. Make sure the person you are selecting has the character and values that will represent your business well.
2. Once hired, train the person in what they need to know. I have never seen someone fired because they didn't know enough. Having witnessed over one hundred firings close up, every example is because of a personality problem that didn't fit the culture.
3. Consider what you can do to make your job more psychologically attractive than your competitors.
4. Become the boss you always wished that you had.

**Profile**

Dr. Ken Byrne has been a Corporate Psychologistic in independent practice for over forty years. As an advisor to businesses wanting to hire or promote staff, he has been directly involved in over 3000 hiring decisions. His services have been called on by Optus, Coles-Myer, Australia Post, Tattersalls; The Walt Disney Company, The State of Tasmania and a host of small to medium sized businesses.

Ken is the author a new book titled [Seeing Behind the Job Applicant's Mask Before You Hire](https://www.amazon.com.au/Seeing-Behind-Applicants-Mask-Before/dp/0648675513)  **Secrets of a Corporate Psychologist.** Here he outlines in detail many of the issues discussed above, as well as practical advice on how to avoid hiring the wrong person.