

Hiring Youth Right; A Checklist for All Employers

You want to hire some new employees and are thinking about focusing on inexperienced people, or you may already have youth on staff and know the value they offer to your team. The following is a checklist designed to assist you in preparing, searching and working with young employees. .

Youth have many advantages over their more experienced co-workers. They tend to be less expensive to hire, are easily trained, have no preconceived notions, are energetic, flexible, willing to learn and can bring with them some of the latest knowledge in a specific field. Some jobs may be more suited to young people, especially those that require interaction with customers in their age group. On the other hand, youth often have little work experience and limited life experience, and therefore they may have some difficulty when confronted with a complex situation and may not be mature enough to deal with it. Youth often require intensive training, continuous guidance and/or monitoring or education in basic business practices.

But, we were all given a first job opportunity. I try to remember that years ago somebody gave me a chance to prove myself, and now I am prepared to give others a chance too. Hiring a youthful employee can be more than just providing them with a job, it can be providing them with a first step and be rewarding to you as a result.

The Preparation: Defining Your Needs

List the specific tasks of the job. Remember the differences between skills and qualities. One can teach skills, and tasks usually are a reflection of work experience or similar tasks performed. Qualities are more ingrained and are transferable across a wide range of positions.

- What skills, if any, are required to perform each of these tasks, e.g. computer skills, a second language, product knowledge, etc.
- What qualities are required, e.g. responsible, willingness to learn, energy, people orientation, team work, enthusiasm, etc.
- Is someone with previous experience required or can the job be performed by someone with the right set of qualities? Remember, the experienced candidate will have higher salary expectations.
- Is the job permanent or temp, P/T or F/T? Would the job fit well with a school schedule or a summer student? Make sure the person you choose is aware of the hours required for the job and decide if you can be flexible when it comes to exam schedules or other circumstances.
- Decide whether or not a co-op student may fulfill your needs. If you are looking only for a short term hire or want to try someone out first and are willing to teach the student as they work, a co-op student may be an excellent alternative, especially if you are seeking someone with a specific skill. Most local high schools, colleges or universities have coop programs.

The Search

- Use the reference checking process first, not last, by asking trusted sources or co-workers. Find out if they can refer somebody they feel may be appropriate for the job. Offer current employees a finders' fee or bonus for new hires they refer.

- Keep an eye out for good prospects even if no jobs are currently open. Make sure they know about you as well. Accept résumés and database them. Be willing to answer questions from youth who maybe looking for information or even a job, even if you have none available; note their contact information for future reference. Those young people who approach you have already shown that they have initiative, a quality that everyone looks for. Then, unexpected turnover won't have you stressed thinking you have to start your search from scratch.
- If hiring straight from school, asking department heads or teachers for their recommendations; it's usually better than relying on guidance or placement services who typically accept and put forward all student applications.

The Interview

- Build your needs into the interview, e.g. get samples of writing, critical thinking, math abilities or ask how they would handle a particular situation that could occur during the job.
- Define the qualities you are looking for and communicate them to applicants. Then, they will know what is expected of them and be able to provide examples of where they used those qualities.
- Put yourself in the applicant's shoes. Why would they want to work for your firm and why would they want to stay? Don't forget you need to sell the job to the right candidate and motivate a potential employee to work with you.
- Ensure that you get an idea of their short- and long-term goals. Do they fit in with your expectations?
- Get and check references. In those cases where youth may not be able to provide sufficient work-related references suggest that they provide the names of teachers, coaches or volunteer group leaders, e.g. scoutmasters, church leaders, etc.

On the Job

- Help them meet their goals. Involve them in your business by including them in company meetings and projects. Allow them to participate in company training, even if it may not be directly related to their work. Give them greater responsibility as they progress by providing them with new challenges as they become more comfortable with their work. Try to encourage them if they show an interest in a certain aspect of the business by targeting their work or continuing education in that direction.
- Reward loyalty. Retention bonuses help save costs if it reduces turnover. If the job is temporary or seasonal, help them want to come back again by guaranteeing them a job, increasing their salary, or providing incentives (e.g. discounts, holidays, etc.). But remember, money may not be the best motivator. Young people respond well to a cohesive team work environment, learning opportunities and a sense of common purpose. Engaging youth in outside activities such as customer appreciation days, company athletic teams or celebrating employee birthdays helps foster a teamwork environment.
- Show appreciation for work well done. Young workers need more

feedback as they may not fully understand how to judge their self performance.

- Ensure you have adequate supervision for them. Expect lots of questions from young employees and also expect that they have not yet learned the right questions to ask. Expect to initially put in some extra time not only to train but to teach what is expected of them.

Please feel free to share your success stories with us for future articles; you can email your comments (or criticisms) to me at wolf@wolfgugler.com