



More Hiring, Less Firing

9 Tips for Staffing Success

Hiring shouldn't be a headache! Decide what you're looking for first, and you'll be able to weed out candidates that aren't a good match for your company. Photo courtesy of Pixabay.

By Stephanie Weber

Hiring and firing. It's a natural part of a restaurant's life cycle. But if you and your staff aren't on the same page, it can be disastrous, resulting in higher than average turnover, unhappy customers, and ultimately, lower revenues.

So just what are the best hiring practices to follow?

"It's a very loaded question [and] it's not one size fits all," says Carrie Luxem, Founder and President of Restaurant HR Group. "But there's also some simplicity to it."

Based in Chicago, Illinois, Carrie and her team work with restaurants of all sizes. Yet no matter an operation's scope, the problems are often similar.

Keys to Success

Here's 9 ways to approach hiring, and in turn, hopefully avoid firing.

1. **Know your brand and culture.** "Brand" and "company culture" are popular buzzwords in the business world, and rightly so. With many markets saturated, a restaurant without a unique identity will flounder. "Know who you are as a brand and what your ultimate goals are," advises Luxem.
2. **Embrace proactivity.** Hiring, and HR needs in general, can be tempting to put off as long as possible. But when a major issue arises, you can find yourself making rash decisions in crisis mode. Choose to embrace a proactive stance and save yourself time and money.

3. **Find the missing puzzle pieces.** From top managers down to busboys, hire only those candidates who align with your brand and culture. Everyone on the payroll should be working towards the same goals. The resulting synergy will be well worth the effort.
4. **Plan for today...and tomorrow.** Identify the short- and long-term plans for each position. Do you need temporary or seasonal help? Or perhaps hourlies seeking future promotions?
"Skillset needs will vary based on your plan," says Luxem, so it's an important step to consider. Someone interested in only working weeknights wouldn't be a good fit for a weekend manager position.
5. **Identify ideal candidates.** Don't forget to look at the whole picture. You know you need a stellar dessert chef, but what about their other qualities? If flexibility, sense of humor, and ability to take constructive criticism are necessary for the role and complement the company culture, then you need to take notice and screen potential hires appropriately.
"If you don't know who you are looking for, then how can you find the right person?" adds Luxem. "It's about finding the right person for your concept."
6. **Get in the trenches.** Although Suzy Q appears

to be the ideal server on paper, reserve your final judgment until the face-to-face interview. If at that point, you notice she snaps her gum, sneezes into her hand, and won't let you get a word in edge-wise, Suzy Q might not be the right fit. Personality sometimes trumps experience.

- 7. Have some fun.** Recognize that you actually want to have a good time. "It sounds silly, but [operators] don't identify that and they just look at their bottom line," says Luxem. While it's OK to only be concerned about the numbers, successful owners often hire people, like managers, who can better handle the staffing aspect. They understand that hiring the right people will ultimately increase the bottom line.
- 8. Be honest.** Yes, it sounds cliché, but too often owners sugarcoat the truth. If you're in a rough transitional period, don't be afraid to tell potential hires. Avoid the sordid details, but a simple "this is our current situation, this is what we're doing to fix it, and this is where we hope to be in six months" is appropriate. Being open and honest avoids misrepresentation. The last thing you want is for the candidate to step into the position and feel like they've been duped.
- 9. Turnover happens.** Despite your best efforts, every restaurant will still experience turnover. Servers graduate college and venture into their field of study. Chefs relocate to another state to be closer to family. It's perfectly normal.

Look Beyond the Process

The hiring process can be a thorn in any owner's side. But Luxem offers some much-needed perspective. "People

know that life is short and they want to go to work and be happy. They want to make money and advance and we're in an amazing industry for that."

Why, yes. Yes, we are.

Stephanie Weber is a freelance writer, copywriter and editor hailing from the Midwest. To contact her or see more of her work, please visit www.stephweber.com.

Tips for finding candidates:

- *Use Craigslist... with caution. Luxem says Craigslist can be a good tool to find hourly staff, but it's also easy to get overwhelmed with responses. Enlist managers and staff to help screen candidates, but only if they are clear about the qualifications you are seeking.*
- *Recruiters may be worth the price. When scouting out salaried staff, like General Managers, recruiters may be the way to go. However, they tend to come with a hefty price tag and it can be difficult for them to fully comprehend the company culture, so be sure to research your options.*
- *Link up on LinkedIn. Social media has really become the great connector. "LinkedIn is the new way to cold call people," says Luxem. It's a fantastic, unintimidating way to reach out to potential candidates. And if owners upgrade to a premium account, they'll have even more resources at their fingertips.*
- *Free up your advertising dollars. Try out a newer platform, called ShiftGig.com, for your hourly staffing needs. Employers can create a free account and browse through candidates' profiles. No pressure and no cost.*
- *Never turn away an application. Even if you aren't hiring at the moment, always allow a job seeker to fill out an application. The reason is twofold: it protects you legally and it gives you a pool of candidates when you do need to increase your staff. "When you tell a candidate you're not hiring, the reality in this industry is that you are hiring in two days," adds Luxem.*



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