


progressing business



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Don't get led up the garden path

What small business owners need to know about staffing

Karen Schmidt, Let's Grow.



Running a small business requires a range of skills. Smart owners know that they should take advice from others in areas that are outside their expertise. The problem is that unless you are careful you can find yourself getting bad advice from well meaning people who may be operating from old paradigms.

This is particularly true when it comes to the topic of staff. The result can be that you waste time, money and sleep plus potentially damage your reputation with potential employees, customers and suppliers.

So what are some of the staffing myths that lead small business owners up the garden path? Here are the top 7 I have come across.

USE FAMILY, IT'S CHEAPER

It may be cheaper in terms of wage costs but employing family members can turn out to be far more expensive than you might imagine in the long run. Giving directions or correcting errors is hard enough with a paid employee but when it's your spouse/child/cousin it can be even more difficult. Plus, it all depends on whether that family member has the right skill set for the job. It is false economy to let someone perform a role when they don't really know what they are doing and other people have to compensate for their lack of skill.

STICK WITH CASUALS AND CONTRACTORS

This is a great way to have flexibility and avoid unfair dismissal laws but it is not the best way to create a committed, engaged group of people who are passionate about helping your business to succeed. Sure, use short term hires for tasks and projects that really are short term but when it comes to ongoing work you are always better off with someone who has a greater level of commitment to the business. The only way you can get them to commit is if you commit to them by making them a permanent employee.

HIRE PEOPLE THAT ARE LIKE YOU

In theory this sounds great but in practice it can limit the

growth of your business and lead to insular thinking. Unless your customers represent a very narrow, easily defined demographic having a range of people on your team can be an excellent way of customising your service offering. IBM learnt this one the hard way when they found that recruiting people who were identical just didn't work.

USE YOUNG PEOPLE, THEY ARE CHEAPER

I'm all for giving young people a start in their career but don't employ them simply because you perceive they cost less because you may find it costs you more money. If a more experienced person is required they are likely to be more cost effective in the long run as a young, inexperienced person will require greater training and more supervision to get them up to speed.

DON'T USE YOUNG PEOPLE, THEY ARE TOO MUCH TROUBLE

The wrong young people are too much trouble, just as the wrong people of any age can be. Avoid stereotyping someone simply because of their age. Yes, they will require a bit more guidance on the unwritten rules of work but think of the upside. You have the opportunity to train them to your requirements, rather than having to retrain a more experienced person who may have developed bad habits in past jobs.

YOU CAN'T COMPETE WITH LARGER ORGANISATIONS FOR THE REAL TALENT

There are just as many advantages and disadvantages working for a large corporation as there are working for a small business. Many people are making a calculated decision to regain their work life balance, to find employment in their local community and feel they are contributing something rather than simply making money for a faceless conglomerate. Good people are looking for good employers so if you can become one it doesn't matter how big or small you are.

IF YOU PAY PEOPLE ENOUGH MONEY THE REST DOESN'T MATTER

Oh yes it does. There has been study after study that proves, after a certain point, money ceases to motivate people. They need someone else, something less tangible to keep them working at their best, to get them caring about

what they do and how they do it. In fact one of the most valuable rewards is flexible working conditions for both parents and non-parents. This is something that small businesses are ideally placed to offer.

So, how many of these staffing myths have you been guilty of believing? How far up the wrong path have those beliefs taken you? If you want to get back on the path to an engaged workforce then start by examining the way you think and then developing some new beliefs. Before you know it you will be on the right track for staffing success.

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