

SMALL BUSINESS GUIDE

Hiring & Keeping Employees

Create a no-fail hiring plan, find top talent and keep them inspired and motivated on the job.



The Small Business Guide to Hiring and Keeping Employees

By Ki Thomas

Recruiting has never been a breeze, and the Great Resignation era has proven to be an unexpected additional roadblock in recent years. With a rising trend in quitting and job hopping within in the last decade, landing a new hire is a miracle, but also comes with the concern of how long until they leave.

Whether your hiring strategy is falling flat, or retention challenges are secretly draining your quality of services and bank account, this guide has the answers.

“ **50%** of small business owners said it was harder to hire in the third quarter of 2022 than it was in the year prior. ~CNBC

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01

Hiring Successfully

In a perfect world, businesses would post a job listing and collect dozens of skilled applicants. Interviews would be a breeze and you'd have new employees onboarded by the following week.

Sadly, we don't live in a perfect world, and landing talented employees can be difficult. It's not because they're not out there and willing to work. Perhaps you are not meeting your potential candidates where they're at. Or it could be that they're not convinced you're worth working for.

Landing the talent a business needs requires a bit of work, but with proper planning and a helpful staff, landing top talent is achievable.



Make a Hiring Plan

A strategic hiring plan begins with determining what the company's specific needs are. This is where business owners dig into how many employees are required to meet the business's needs.

As you look at these needs, seek insight from key stakeholders and other employees to better understand the responsibilities. This will serve as a great help when building out the listing.

During the planning process, deciding on a workable budget is important. This helps keep the business's overall budget in line while also providing a bird's-eye view into any extra financial wiggle room in case salaries need negotiation.

Keep in mind that a timeline must be in place to keep the hiring process on track and avoid any excess spending that comes with outsourcing assistance.

Helpful Tip:

Test different versions of your listing's content to uncover which brings in the most high-quality candidates.

“ At the beginning of 2023, small-businesses had 3 million more job openings than before the pandemic.
~U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Post the Job

Anatomy of a proper hiring listing

Clear Position Title

While it may be tempting to put a lofty job title on your listing to attract talent, it'll shoot you in the foot when you get too creative. Because candidates are searching for related titles, having an over-the-top title will result in the listing not populating in the search results. Now the money put toward the listing is wasted.

Keep the job title in line with industry language and brief. In fact, most typical length for a job title is between 12-20 characters. Save the creativity for the job description.

When in doubt, checking out other listings openings in related industries is a great way to ensure you're not too far off on the mark.

Helpful Tip:

Avoid using jargon and industry buzzwords in your job posting that may confuse otherwise excellent candidates.

Detailed Job Description

No one enjoys saying yes blindly. Provide a detailed account of what applicants can expect from this role in the company. This saves you from collecting applications for those who are not the best fit for your company.

Be sure to include the responsibilities and duties expected for the role. Use this as a space where the candidates can visualize themselves in the company.

When it come to the description, length matters. When descriptions are too short, they aren't supplying enough context for candidates to be influenced; however, extra-long job descriptions give off an overly demanding work environment that may turn applicants off. So, what is the perfect length? For descriptions between 4,000 and 5,000 characters, the number of applicants who click-to-apply lands at just under 15%.

For context, descriptions of 1,000 to 2,000 characters have a click-to-apply of rate of 6.7%, and descriptions with less than 1,000 characters, are a measly 3%.

Qualifications

While it's important to make it clear what the company is searching for, avoid over-stuffing your required qualifications. Keep the list straightforward to avoid running off applicants who don't feel confident checking off all 20 requirements. Those candidates may offer more transferrable skills.

“ ***An employee's opinion is considered three times more credible than the CEO's when it comes to talking about working conditions in that company.***

~Glassdoor

Company Successes

This is the time to showcase why applicants should rush to apply. Which awards make the company stand out amongst others?

When you built your marketing plan, you considered your unique value proposition to highlight what makes your business stand out against the competition. You can take that same approach to bringing on new talent to your staff.

Your employee value proposition, or EVP, is the balance of benefits your employee receives for their time with your company. What does your business offer in exchange for employees' skills? Is there health insurance coverage or assistance to pay gym fees?

Maybe you landed on the top 100 best small businesses to work for in the state. Regardless, an EVP must be both compelling and unique to attract talent (as well as increase engagement and retention, but more on that later.)

Find and Attract the Talent

By using a variety of hiring methods, you open your business up to the best results. Take the extra step and implement recruiting analytics into your hiring practices to get a clear picture of what's working and where improvements can be made.

Hiring Databases

When seeking out a large pool of candidates, a job portal is a great first step. It allows businesses with vacancies and jobseekers who are open to new opportunities to meet halfway. By including detailed requirements, and with the help of the listing site's filter-matching features, businesses are brought closer to meeting their ideal hires.

Helpful Tip:

Try minority job hiring sites for better diversity during the searching process.

LinkedIn Recruitment

Those working in more white-collar industries tend to lean on LinkedIn when it comes to bringing in fresh talent. There are 875 million members on LinkedIn spanning more than 200 countries and territories worldwide.

With so many people just a click away, LinkedIn is a promising route for businesses looking to showcase their business to potential applicants.

LinkedIn can be a recruiting gold mine. Not only is it less time-consuming than other job sites, but it's more targeted and streamlined.



Social Recruiting

More businesses are leveraging social media for their passive hiring efforts as platforms continue to grow. While the people hanging out on social media are not looking for a job while they scroll around, they may be swayed to apply after seeing your position availability posts.

Even though some may not apply in that moment, there's the likelihood of them returning to check your page when they are ready to start their search.

“ Among the more than 750 million LinkedIn users, approximately 40 million them are searching for jobs each week. ~LinkedIn

Employee Referrals

Another great way to avoid the time-consuming hiring search is to open up an employee referral plan. Who better to brag about your company than the ones who work there?

Having an employee referral program in place can not only decrease the cost per hire but also improve the quality of the hire.

Create a transparent and motivated employee referral plan by having:

- ✓ Attractive incentives in place
- ✓ An easy-to-understand process
- ✓ Communication with the referrers

Recruiting Content

Create content for your website and social platform that screams “This is where you want to work!” This route takes a business from chasing potential employees to being sought after by them.

This requires a lot less planning than any of the other hiring tactics. Ask members of your staff to record a fun day-in-the-life video showcasing how great it is in your office. If they have the time, you can offer blog spots for this as well. For example, 5 reasons I love my job at (company name).

Helpful Tip:

When looking for job candidates, tap into your network and ask for referrals from people who are well-connected in your community.



Recruiting analytics at a glance:

- **Source:** Which platforms are sending you the most applicants and who is sending the most qualified applicants?
- **Time to fill the position:** How long does it take from application to acceptance?
- **Time to hire:** How long from the time of acceptance does it take to onboard the employee?
- **Diversity:** How diverse is the candidate pool? Diverse talent means a broader range of skills.
- **Cost per hire:** How much is being spent. Total cost of listing advertisements per number of hires.
- **Quality of hire:** How's it working out? Look at performance reviews, surveys or historical data like how many candidates quit within the first year.
- **Hiring experience:** How new employees feel about the overall hiring process with your company.

Reviewing Prospects

You've posted your job listings and got your team onboard with the EVP and now the applications are pouring in. It's miserable and magical as weeding through endless applications can quickly become overwhelming.

It's a great problem to have but a problem worth resolving, nevertheless. Learning how to shortlist candidates will make the process of hiring less stressful and a bit quicker.

Shortlisting is simply identifying the applicants who meet the criteria within the job listing. You don't have the time to interview every applicant and so, this is where you weed out the applicants with skills that don't necessarily fit the position.

Helpful Tip:

Quickly weed out any resumes or cover letters that use generic messaging and are not tailored to the needs of your job opening.

“52% of recruiters say the hardest part of the job is identifying the right candidates from a large talent pool.

~LinkedIn

Step 1: Review the criteria

Refer to your listing. What were your must-haves and what were your nice-to-have skills? The must-haves are those basic requirements while nice-to-have skills are bonuses that will edge applicants closer to the top of your list.

This is a process that can be automated through keyword-identifying tools. Be forewarned that technology can sometimes be fickle. Double-check that your automation process is appropriately sorting applicants. The system removing qualified applicants is a recipe for disaster.

“ On average, **22% of applicants are invited to interviews.**

~Zippia

Step 2: Decide on a cap

The point of a shortlist is that it's ... well, short. Decide on a cutoff number. Determining how many applicants you want to move forward with before beginning the process ensures the shortlist built is carefully selected.

If you end up with more highly qualified applicants than you have slots on your shortlist, interview them anyway. Likewise, if your shortlist slots aren't filled once you're done reviewing applications, don't bother stuffing the list.

It's better to have three qualified candidates to interview than to tack on five more less-than-qualified applicants and waste everyone's time.



Ranking Applicants

Once the shortlist is built, the screening process begins but, before you start, you may need to unlearn one habit: Removing the candidates who don't fit what you're looking for. If an applicant made it onto the shortlist, that's promising. Rather than nix them, look for transferable skills.

By seeking out prospects who check off all the boxes, employers end up with employees who, while great on paper, are not prepared to grow along with the company.

Score applicants using the M.E.P. (mandatory, essential, preferred) system. Rank your criteria and qualifications based on whether the skill is mandatory, essential or preferred.

As you interview, allocate a single point for every mandatory skill, two points for each essential skill and three points for preferred skills. After tallying the scores, identifying the strongest candidate for the job is easy.

Scoring this way also helps pinpoint which strengths and weaknesses to inquire about during the interview.

Once interviews have concluded and a selection has been made, it's vital that onboarding is as frictionless as possible. This will begin planting the seed for a great employee experience, which will lead to better employee retention.

Helpful Tip:

At the beginning of the interview, talk about your business and keep the conversation light to take the edge off the candidate's nerves.

Shift from Reactive to a Proactive Hiring

If a business is solely hiring when a new position opens, they're operating from a deficit and a place of desperation. Because there's an immediate need to fill this position, a business can hire out of haste and not make the best choice.

Those businesses would benefit from taking a proactive approach. Rather than hiring because someone else has left the company, continuously hire based on the company's future needs. By doing this, there's now a pipeline of high-quality candidates in the pipeline.

Helpful Tip:

Maintain a strong online presence for your business through consistent social media posting. Potential future hires will be watching!

Benefits of proactive hiring:

- ✓ Higher quality candidates
- ✓ Shorter hiring spans
- ✓ Lower cost per hire
- ✓ Less stress hiring
- ✓ Better employer brand

02

Retaining Employees

If a business is constantly on the hunt to fill positions but your company is not actively growing, there's an employee retention problem, and high employee turnover cannot be ignored. Recruiting and training new hires on a regular basis without the growth as a business becomes a money hole.

On top of that, with every employee that exits, the remaining employees experience decreased productivity and low morale. And those in charge of training must do so quickly and effectively to fill the knowledge loss and avoid any incidental costs.

Luckily improving employee turn-over can be done by addressing overlooked issues. Here are four methods to improve employee retention.



Method 1: Update the Work Model

The workforce is changing, and businesses must meet the demands of employees. While no one expects companies to throw away the traditional concept of working, now's is the time to rethink the operation model for managing company talent and the work they do.

In the coming years, flexibility is key — and that's not solely remote work. When it comes to many service-based industries, remote work is not an option.

Companies' narrow view of what true flexibility looks like results in staff seeking employment elsewhere and the continuous struggle to attract top talent.

Offer flexibility tailored to staff's needs whether that's to accommodate a better work-life balance, physical or emotional health or care for their families.

Flexibility = Loyalty

A single parent would be more likely to stay with a company if they knew they could head to work a few hours early and be able to end their day with enough time to pick up their children from school to cut aftercare costs.

- **Businesses should be flexible about where work can be done.** If your company can stand to offer remote or hybrid work, give it a try for the sake of a better work-life balance.
- **Businesses should be flexible about when work can be done.** Flexible hours are the part of the employee retention strategy many businesses are missing. Three out of four employees say that having control over *when* they work played a key factor in impacting their decision to accept their current job.
- **Businesses should be flexible about how work can be done.** Putting employees in the driver's seat when it comes to how they get day-to-day tasks accomplished is important. No, we aren't talking about a free for all; however, skilled employees benefit from uncovering what processes work best for them. Being open to staff suggestions when it comes to innovative technology or new ways to work on larger tasks may change the trajectory of the business.

Method 2: Pay Attention to Feedback

Employees are growth partners. In the same way business owners seek insight from those on the advisory board, employees should be heard as well. Employee engagement is one of the major keys to running a successful business. Employees give their best when they feel their best, so don't overlook employee insight.

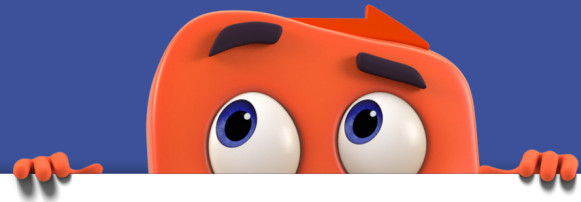
Issue a series of company-wide surveys to gain a clear understanding of what is and isn't working for employees.

- Employee opinion and satisfaction surveys examine employee views, attitudes and perceptions of their organization. These are also known as "climate surveys."
- Employee culture survey gauges the point of view of employees and is designed to evaluate whether it aligns with that of the organization.
- Employee engagement surveys look at employees' commitment, motivation, sense of purpose and passion for their work and the company.

Surveys don't have to be a daunting task. The number of questions included in a survey will impact the results as long surveys may result in staff not giving it their full effort for the sake of time. Ensuring anonymity will also aid in getting the rawest answers possible.

Not sure if staff would want to give feedback? We're here to inform you that they will. Employees want to enjoy coming to work and, if business owners ask the right questions, they're closer to that reality.

Surveys should be a positive experience, so try quick polls, games and visuals to gauge how the staff feels. Be sure that as feedback is received, it's documented with action taken.



Reasons employees leave their jobs

Poor compensation

It's no surprise that poor compensation is one of the top reasons people quit. In fact, 63% of workers credit low pay as one of their reasons for quitting.

Disrespect

Whether from questionable workplace practices or a toxic work environment, 57% said feeling disrespected contributed to their leaving.

Lack of advancement opportunities

63% of workers felt like it was impossible to get ahead of their current position and so that played a part in them quitting.

Poor management

The phrase goes people don't leave jobs; they leave managers. Research has shown that only three out of 10 bosses have the natural talent to manage people, which means if the other seven out of 10 aren't in classes to improve their managerial skills, they could be running staff away.

Zero flexibility

Life happens and if a company doesn't allow employees to go with the flow, whether that's adjusting work hours or offering days off, they run the risk of losing that staff member. 48% say they left a job because the job didn't provide adequate childcare benefits or the ability to be with children on off time.

Overworking

Being over-worked is the No. 1 cause of work-related stress. A lack of work-life balance is a close second. Employees who don't feel like their mental health matters to the company are more likely to walk out.

Lack of recognition

While this may appear to be a pride issue, lack of recognition can lead to employee burnout.

~Pew Research Center

Method 3: Focus on Work-life Balance

Work-life balance is not an accomplishment — it's a cycle. Earlier we spoke on flexibility and, while work-life balance was mentioned, it stems beyond flex scheduling.

Having a healthy work-life balance also looks like being overwhelmed by work. Even high-performing employees can switch from being optimistic to unproductive as they fight through a cumbersome workload.

When employees can maintain a healthy balance between professional and personal lives, they are able to reduce the risk of burnout, stress, anxiety and depression. They also gain the energy and focus to be more productive and creative at work.

Ensuring tasks and goals set before employees are realistic will allow for a more harmonious work-life balance. The other side of that looks like ensuring staff have the proper emotional support.

It is essential for employees to feel supported, respected and valued in the workplace to maintain their mental health. Mental wellness can influence employees' attitudes, performance and engagement, so creating an environment of psychological safety is key.

This includes encouraging open communication, providing resources for stress management and creating policies that support mental health.

Additionally, employers should promote self-care and mindfulness practices, as well as offering access to mental health services when needed. By prioritizing mental wellness, companies can cultivate a culture of inclusivity and respect, leading to better productivity, higher morale and greater job satisfaction.

An employee may be underpaid if:

You've increased an employee's responsibility or they've gained specialized training and their pay has not been adjusted to reflect that growth or inflation.

Method 4: Create a Sense of Belonging

When your employees feel accepted in the workplace, they'll be sure to stay a longer. Because people want to belong, creating a sense of belonging in the workplace leads to higher employee performance.

Creating a sense of belonging in the workplace begins with fostering an environment of respect and collaboration.

- Eliminate any “outsiderness” by encouraging team members to get to know each other. This can be done by establishing team building activities and recognizing individual contributions to the team.
- Demonstrate care by celebrating successes and special occasions together, such as birthdays, holidays and company anniversaries.
- Provide learning and development opportunities to help employees grow and develop. This way they continue grow as a valuable member of the staff as the company grows.

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“ Employees with a sense of belonging at **6x more likely to be engaged.**

~Glint

The Small Business Guide to Hiring and Keeping Employees

Your employees are the foundation of your business. An all-in-one business management software tool like Thryv can help you find and retain employees in several ways. Use Thryv to put your best foot forward to potential new hires by managing your business's online presence, with everything from your Google Business Profile to social media management.

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