



When an employee leaves

Having to replace someone who has retired, or simply decided they want a change, can be a challenging experience for a manager. As managers typically rely on their key employees, the transition may even have a detrimental impact on operations.

To ease the stress and raise the odds that you will find the right replacement employee, here are a few tips on hiring correctly.

Involve others

The first rule of thumb is not to conduct the entire interview process on your own. Not only are managers usually too busy to carry out the interview and selection process for every position, other employees will benefit from the opportunity to develop their interviewing skills. As the selection of the new employee will affect most of the people in the business, have supervisory staff conduct the initial interviews to narrow the selection to the best candidates. Make hiring a team decision, by encouraging their input before you make the final selection.

Understand the job

A failure to match prospects with the position often results when management does not have a clear understanding of the job function. You need an in-depth understanding of the work and the required skills to be able to attract the right candidate. Consider that quality candidates looking towards future opportunities within the company may shy away from a position if the job definition is lacking or unfocused on their chosen career directions.

The best practice is to complete an in-depth



review of the job function when an employee gives notice. Discuss every aspect of the job. Once you assess the current job, you can set out the education, skill and training requirements more accurately.

Rethink the position

When an employee leaves, this is an opportunity to rethink a job position. The longer employees are in a position, the more their tasks and responsibilities may broaden and develop. A combination of new technology, a changing market, and the experience and skills of other employees could make all, or part, of the old position redundant. Or, the function may have evolved to the point where you need a person with more experience and training.

Look for the correct fit

The majority of people who leave their jobs cite a key factor was 'bad chemistry'. Selecting the right replacement is not simply a matter of finding someone with the right job skills. Often, an excellent source of candidate is the person who already works for you. Since they already have many of the attributes that

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your company values, they may know someone who has similar characteristics and the right job skills. Use staff meetings and job postings to let your employees know that the company is looking for staff. Some businesses offer cash incentives to the employee who recommends a candidate who is ultimately hired. When you consider the cost of advertising or a placement agency, this incentive could actually save working capital. In addition, employee rewards encourage them to recommend a good fit, which also helps narrow the selection process.

Consider temporary staffing

When a business is picking up, labour costs can often outstrip the revenue stream. If you are reluctant to hire permanent staff, consider temporary staffing until you are better able to assess the company's needs. You could also consider hiring a contract worker or part-time employee to fill the position during the time it takes to find a full-time replacement. Hire students part-time, or join a local secondary school, or university co-op program to give students an opportunity to learn about your business. If the position requires more experience and skills, or your employees are too busy to provide the necessary training, consider the wealth of experience that a retired worker can offer.

A transition period will give you more time to find the right candidate as well as provide opportunities for your staff to train and supervise others. Covering labour shortages for a short term may be fine, but if the situation continues, you risk exhausting your valuable employees who must handle the additional responsibilities.

Succession planning

Perhaps the greatest shortfall in managing a company's staffing needs is not planning for the inevitable loss of employees. Plan not only for the inevitability that some employees will decide to move on, but also the career development of valued employees who need an opportunity to move up the ladder of responsibility, and be rewarded for their gains in skills, knowledge and performance. Good management looks at the long-term future of the organisation to determine how the company can develop the strengths of the people already on board.

Hire right the first time

Smaller organisations need individuals who are strong in specific job skills but also have the flexibility, creativity and desire to learn new skills and work co-operatively with the entire team. The key to a successful, consistent work force in small business is making sure that employees are the right fit for your company and that includes a positive attitude about their jobs, fellow employees and the organisation.

Building a brand



A brand identity represents a mental or emotional association in the mind of a customer. It is initiated by the images used in your advertising, and by the words used to describe your products. After sufficient impressions, the customer remembers these associations and a brand is born.

Large corporations spend hundreds of millions of dollars building their brands for good reason. Brands:

- help customers remember your products or services
- build customer loyalty and lead to repeated purchases
- make it easier for current clients or customers to refer you to others
- send a message as to what your customers can expect
- convey an emotion
- add value

Most importantly, the thing to remember is that a brand is a promise. Essentially, branding is then a process in which a business creates and delivers on customer expectations. When someone buys your product or service, they count on those expectations to be fulfilled.

The components of your brand promise are based on:

1. Consistent look-and-feel

At the most basic level, to build a brand you must develop a strong brand image. Consistent look-and-feel extends to your logo, colours, typefaces, décor, employee uniforms, and more. Professional service providers, such as solicitors, should make sure their brochures, business cards, website, stationery, etc. all have a consistent look-and-feel.

2. Consistency of experience

This is the building block of a brand. How can you do this in a small company? Take building a brand for your hair salon. Every client's visit should feel the same as the last. This includes the same type of music, the same greeting, and the same type of treatment every time.

3. Consistent quality

It is not sufficient to deliver a consistent experience to your customer only. The experience must also be of a certain level of quality. McDonald's French fries don't have to be the best French fries in the world, but they have to be good French fries. And they have to be good every time.

4. Distinct competitive position

A brand must stand for something and distinguish you

from the competition. The easiest way for a small company to develop this distinct brand position is to focus on a niche or specialised market.

5. Repeated exposure

To remember your brand, customers must hear it or see it over and over again. Building brand awareness takes money, and that can be a challenge for small businesses. The objective should be to clearly and narrowly define your target market. The next step is to make sure you expose those potential customers by repeated advertising messages in the same publications, exhibiting at the same trade shows and attending the same networking events.

A brand is a complex entity and a somewhat abstract concept in the mind of a customer. Brand identity is the description of a brand and how it is positioned in the marketplace. Brand image, on the other hand, is the internal emotional reaction by the customer to the brand identity itself.

The brand image is made up of your products' appeal, functionality, popularity, and perceived value. These attributes should be used when designing and executing your brand marketing strategy. If this is done effectively, the new customers you obtain and the existing customers who buy from you again will feel that you have delivered on your promise, which is the basis for a positive brand image.

The benefits of baby boomers



Baby boomers are defying marketing experts' traditional beliefs about older consumers. The theory has always been that once a person has reached middle age, their purchasing preferences become fixed. But baby boomers are changing the rules.

A generation that believed in questioning authority is now more than willing to switch telephone companies, hairdressers, or toothpaste. They are eager to go to new places, try new gadgets and to buy off the Internet.

This makes them a prime target as consumers for any company – including small businesses.

What can you expect baby boomers to spend their money on?

Health care – baby boomers are more willing than previous generations to consider alternative and preventive health care approaches.

Travel – with good health, good finances and the kids out of the house, baby boomers have more time and money to see the world.

Appearance - skin care and cosmetics, gyms and fitness centres, plastic surgery. Baby boomers may be getting older but they don't want to look it.

Second homes - with their first homes paid off, or with substantial equity, baby boomers have been fuelling demand for second homes.

Their own businesses - there are a lot of fifty year olds taking early retirement or being laid off. Many become consultants or start their dream business. More would quit their day job if they could afford health insurance.

Retirement communities - many baby boomers are opting to live in communities that meet both their social and physical needs.

But small businesses could look to baby boomers as more than just customers. They are also a potential source of employee.

When a person over fifty gets laid off or takes early retirement from a large company, they are more likely to have a hard time finding another job in a similar business. But they have a huge wealth of experience and skills to offer your company.

Here are a few tips to consider when looking to baby boomers as either customers or employees for your business:

- Sit down and brainstorm with your staff about which of your current products or services can be targeted or modified to better meet the needs of the baby boomer market. You might even consider developing new products or services specifically for this market.
 - Target baby boomers in your advertising and marketing material. Include photos of people in their fifties.
 - Target baby boomers in your help-wanted advertisements. Indicate that you value workers of all ages. Be open to older applicants.
 - Baby boomers see themselves as environmentally and socially conscious. Develop more 'green' products and adopt more socially-responsible business practices.
 - Be careful about the terms you use. Baby boomers don't think of themselves as 'senior citizens', or even 'middle aged'.
 - Finally, throw out all your old assumptions. There's never been a generation with access to the same nutrition, health care, education and living standards. Baby boomers will redefine the aging process.
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Is it time to get out?



Have you put dollar after dollar into a new business? Fought day and night to keep a struggling business alive? If so, you would know how hard it is to decide when enough is enough.

Most people find it hard to pull the plug on anything they have put their heart and soul into.

If your business is declining, if you are losing interest in keeping it alive or if you are just getting older and want to retire while your business is at its most valuable, perhaps it is time to consider getting out.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Are you dedicated to making your business work or are you simply scared of change? If you are going to stay, make sure it is for the right reasons.
- Are you learning or improving your skills? Even if the specific project is not a huge success, the career experience could be worth it.
- What are the costs of continuing? It may not be worth devoting all of your time and energy into when there is

something else that you could be focusing on.

- Is this situation taking a toll on or your family and friends? You may be willing to forge ahead but at what price to others and your own emotional and physical well-being?
- What direction has your business generally been going? If things are stagnant — and they have been stagnant for a long time — is this really what you want for yourself? Be brave enough to be honest.
- Do you have a truly reasonable chance at making it work? If not, maybe it is time to make the tough choice to get out.
- Developing a good succession plan or exit strategy will enable a smooth transition, allow you maximum profitability and can help you outline what will happen and who will take over your business when you leave.

Alternatively, you may consider:

Selling up - In order to sell your business officially, you will need to prepare a sales agreement. This is the key document needed when buying the assets of a business. It is important to make sure the agreement is accurate and contains all the terms of the purchase.

Liquidation - Keep in mind that if you liquidate, any proceeds from the assets must be used to repay creditors. The remainder gets divided among the owners - if there are other owners, you want to make sure they get their due.

Acquisition - Find another business that wants to buy yours and sell.

Whatever your exit strategy, it is a good idea to seek professional help before making your final decision and for assistance throughout this difficult time.

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