

THE RETAIL DOCTOR | BY BILLY CUTHRELL

Curbing Entitlement

A year ago, I needed a part-time staffer to work evenings at the counter. I thought it would be perfect for a college student — the job wasn't that difficult and allowed time for classes. I wrote an ad for Craigslist and college job boards outlining the position. I explained that we'd provide training and offer a flexible schedule if the candidate happened to be in a band or needed time off for school or the holidays.

Since guitar is the No. 1 instrument we teach and sell, we wanted someone who could at least play a little, tune and change strings. Other stuff — changing drumheads or helping customers pick out drumsticks — could be taught to the right candidate. I placed the ad and waited for the calls to come flooding in.

And I waited, and waited.

THE RESPONSE

After two weeks, we had zero responses, except for a guy who e-mailed saying he sent his son to America and wanted us to give him music lessons. All we had to do was send the guy our checking account number, and he would “put the cash right in our account.” Other than that, nothing. Nada. Zilch. It wasn't the highest-paying job in the world at \$10–\$12 per hour, but it's not as if we were looking for Steve Jobs' right-hand man.

After four weeks, I reposted the ad on Craigslist for the fifth time and made a new flier for college job boards. This time, I mentioned it would be OK if the candidate didn't have much music experience, but we wanted friendly people who liked to work in a fun environment. I figured unemployment was still high, and a paying job was still a paying job. The scam e-mails from Craigslist kept flooding in.

THE CANDIDATES

At week six, we finally got a few calls. It turned out these people needed to call to continue receiving their unemployment checks and weren't interested in an actual job. I told one guy that the job started at \$10–\$12 an hour and would at least get him working again. He said he could make more collecting unemployment.

Finally, I received calls from two promising candidates. The

first was a gigging guitar player who had two years left in school. The second worked in a music store as a freshman in college, and now, he was a senior looking at sticking around for grad school. That was promising — we wouldn't have to train him, only to watch him leave.

THE INTERVIEWS

When interviews rolled around, the grad school candidate got to the shop 20 minutes late. He never apologized for being late — he even told me he was a little put out that traffic “made” him late.

That said, he was well-spoken and had an air of confidence, even though he wasn't familiar with some of our common name brands and didn't understand our point-of-sale system. (Hadn't he worked in a music store?) About midway through our chat, he cut me off mid-sentence and said, “I know what I'm worth, and 10 bucks is way too low. How about \$20?” I shot back, “How about \$8?” He laughed, but I didn't. He countered with, “I'll settle for \$18,” as he stood to shake my hand. I showed him the door.

An hour later, the second candidate showed up early, and we got off to a good start. He knew our brands and our shop since he'd bought strings and other accessories from us. But before I could ask my first question, he said, “I'm going to save us



Today's hires often have unrealistic expectations. Here's how to set them straight

both time. What are you paying for this job again?" I said, "It starts at \$10, but we can discuss it." He cut me off and told me he wouldn't take less than \$14 — and wanted a raise in a few months. He reasoned that he'd bring lots of people and potential students to our shop from his local gigs. I showed him the door.

THE HIRE

A few weeks later, we got a call from a kid who said he'd seen our ads on Craigslist. By this time, I'd devised a prescreening strategy, so I wouldn't waste anyone's time. I was polite and made a joke or two but then gave him my "directive mandate," laying out the job duties as follows:

"We are looking for someone who doesn't mind paying dues and earning his paychecks. You'll

be the new guy here, and we don't care that you play in bars around town or worked in another music store for a year. Every store is different, and every customer is different. I expect you to show up on time for the actual interview, and if hired, I expect you to show up on time, all the time, and be here 10 minutes before the shift starts. The job pays \$10, but if you have some experience, are a fast learner and can read, write and do basic math, you may start at more, but don't count on it.

"I'm looking for someone who takes responsibility, knows a guitar from a harpsichord, even if you can't spell harpsichord, has a pleasant appearance that won't scare away potential customers and will get along with staff and pass a background check. I know this seems blunt, but that's what

we want, and if you think you can fill it and then some, let's meet."

YOUR DEFENSE

Blunt, yes, but I have found that it's required when dealing with Generation Whatever. Some so-called experts say you need to be their friends and give them freedom to express themselves while letting them make mistakes. These are probably the same experts who tell you to be your child's best friend instead of saying "no" when necessary.

It's your business and your rules. Granted, you want to create a relaxed place to work, but today's young worker needs to understand that basic job duties and responsibilities are the groundwork for successful businesses and employees. Policies are in place for a reason.

I suggest writing an employee manual and keeping it updated to include job expectations, but most of all, be forward and up front the moment you encounter a potential hire. Create your own "directive mandate," and tell the potential hire up front. Letting employees find themselves while making mistakes can cost you time, resources, customers and, sometimes, your business. Finally, don't be afraid to not hire, no matter how badly you want a position filled. I worked extra hours with my staff until we found the right person.

Oh yeah, that kid I tried my "directive mandate" on? He turned out to be one of the best employees we've ever had. **MI**

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