

IDEAS

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LESSONS LEARNED | BY GERSON ROSENBLUM

DON'T BE IN A HURRY TO HIRE

Most well-run retailers tend to keep their staff size in check. Paying excessive salaries doesn't make economic sense for the retailer, nor does it offer adequate opportunity for commissioned sales staff. Particularly through the lean years since the last recession, dealers try to do more with less, greater efficiency from staff members. In short, it's the right way to run a business until either someone decides to leave or you are forced to dismiss staff.

When the inevitable staff vacancy happens, does that trigger an unwanted "fire drill" in your business? When you hear the dreaded, "I'm giving you my two-week notice," do you feel your pulse quicken? When you've been running your business with a staff that's not quite big enough, do you fear that everything will now collapse? Sadly, all too many of us have been in this situation.

I learned my lesson the hard way by making a few rash hiring decisions as a reaction to the stress of being short-staffed. Rather than taking the time to find and hire the right person, I



'It's better to struggle shorthanded than to hire poorly.'

just filled the spot with a warm body. Can you relate?

DON'T SETTLE FOR MIEDOCRITY

From the mistakes I've made, I can tell you to never take a shortcut when hiring a new employee. It will come back to haunt you. "Settling" because you feel that you must fill a spot is always a mistake. It's better to struggle shorthanded than to hire poorly. Having too

few people is far better than having a weak performer who can do damage to your brand, demotivate other staff members, and treat customers at standards below what they deserve and demand.

I get it; I've lived through it. You have a team that is seemingly working at full capacity. You shudder at the thought of providing slower service to your clients. And then an applicant comes along who seems "good enough," if not quite up to your usual standards. You cave into the temptation to plug the hole in the dam.

DEMANDING EXCELLENCE

There's a better way. Rather than relaxing my standards, I developed a discipline of patience. I demanded a level of excellence in the staff that I hired and refused to give into the temptation to lazily fill a spot without regard to what I knew would serve my business and its customers best.

So, what about those concerns about not fulfilling customer needs in the interim? Well, one of the fringe benefits of a tougher hiring mentality was that the remaining staff was motivated to chip in and help abate the

impact of a temporarily smaller staff. They stepped up to the challenge by working harder, working smarter, putting in some extra hours, and seeing to it that customers were kept happy. In reality, my staff appreciated the opportunity to contribute and make a difference. And because they didn't necessarily wish to work overtime on a long-term basis, they became great resources in helping us scout for new talent.

BE ON THE LOOKOUT

One additional tool to limit the impact of staff departures was a mentality of always seeking talent. Even when I didn't need the extra staff, I was always on the lookout for our next hire. Having conversations with potential hires in advance gave me the opportunity to have a list of pre-screened candidates so that I wasn't starting from scratch when the need became urgent.

Don't get caught short; being prepared will go a long way toward limiting employment gaps. **MI**

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