

# The First Steps To Finding An Employee That Fits

Hiring can be like dating – just a lot less fun

Planning to hire a new employee? Congratulations! Your business is obviously doing well — despite what seems a slow economic turnaround. Even if you're not yet considering it, consider clipping this article and keeping it on file. You may be hiring sooner than you think if the economy rebounds as many are predicting.

Don't worry if the hiring process seems a little intimidating. It's understandable. For most service stations and garages, a new hire is a big investment of time and money. Depending on how big your staff is one new employee can effectively double your staff. That can make the process even more stressful.

But what makes the process harder is that hiring is something you don't do very often. Or perhaps something you've never done before.

Picking the right employee is an important job. You want to be careful not to take any shortcuts that could land the wrong employee at your shop. When I say "wrong" I don't mean someone who lacks job skills, I mean someone that doesn't fit in with your shop personality (corporate culture) or is hard to work with. Having technical skills is one thing. Being a good employee is something entirely different. A hard worker is good. Being hard to work with is bad.

You may be extra-busy and need help fast. Don't let that force you to rush the process. Perhaps you can find a temporary moonlighter or part-timer to help you buy the time you need until you can make the right hiring decision. Or maybe you need to farm out work to another shop for a while. Whatever you need to do to get the work done without rushing to hire someone is in your best interest. Finding the right person takes time. In that way, hiring can be much like dating — only a lot less fun.



Here's a brief overview that will give you a roadmap through the initial stages of the hiring process — and a few tips on pitfalls to avoid.

## The Two Most Common Hiring Mistakes

Shop owners and managers — like most small business managers — tend to make one of two hiring mistakes: They don't create a clear, thorough job description; or they hire someone that doesn't fit the job description. Those are very easy mistakes to make. You didn't open a shop to work in human resources. You opened a shop to work on cars.

You should start by deciding what job you want to fill. Sometimes that's harder than it sounds — although if an employee is leaving and you're filling an existing position that can make it easier. Just jot down a list of what that person did.

More often than not, however, you'll find yourself creating a new position.

That's great because it means you're growing, but it also means you need to take inventory. You need to make the time to think about what you need. It takes some work to decide what the new position is and the duties of that job.

As I see it, shop jobs fall into three major categories: sales, clerical/managerial or technical. Although you may be able to find someone who can handle two of these roles, chances are you will rarely find someone who can do all three well. If you do, they likely own their own shop.

So, I suggest you choose one major category and one minor category of job skills you're looking for. Say you want a counter worker who can do order and/or stock inventory. Or perhaps you want a technician who can do a little selling, like writing up an order or cross-selling a customer.

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If this is your first employee, I suggest you write a brief description for your shop. It will help you set priorities and promote efficiency. Then write your own job description.

Your goal is to find someone whose strength is your weakness. If you're disorganized try to find an organizer to help you. If you hate selling, then find someone who likes serving customers. The great part about this strategy is that it frees you from the drudgery and allows you to focus more time on what you like doing. It's a win-win situation.

### **Define The Job To Refine The Job Search**

Once you've defined the job, write it down. Creating a job description is very important. When you meet a likable candidate, it can be easy to lose sight of your job description and end up hiring a "likable liability"—a great person who isn't so great for the job. The better you define the job, the better chance you'll have of finding the right person for it.

Break down the position into job duties — five or 10 tasks you expect this person to do regularly. Listing job duties is important, no matter if you're hiring an experienced technician or a young part-timer. Take the part-timer. His or her job duties might read: "clean-up waiting room, stock parts, sweep shop floor, answer phones, update website and other duties as assigned." It's always a good idea to have "other job duties as assigned" on the list to avoid "it's not my job" complaints as well as potential legal issues. (I think some wedding vows should read "...love, honor, cherish, and other duties as assigned.")

Remember, not only are *you* looking for a job fit, so is your prospect. No one wants to be surprised on the first day that the job isn't what they applied for.

The job description and duties will also come in useful when it's time to do a performance review. Having a clearly defined job allows you to measure your employee's performance.

### **Be Sure You're Fishing In A Well-Stocked Pond**

You may have heard other shop owners complain that it's hard to find good

help. More than likely they haven't drawn from a big enough pool of applicants to find the right one. It's a lot like fishing. If the lake was just stocked, you're more likely to catch a keeper than if the lake has been over-fished. In the same way, you're more likely to find the right employee if you have 20 applicants than if you have two.

So, you need to do everything you can to drum up as many job applicants as possible, so you have more to choose from. You don't want to end up with your only prospect being your neighbor's cousin's ex-boyfriend.

A sign in your window and an ad in the local paper are nice. But most jobs are never listed in the want ads. So, it's best to start by putting your feelers out through the folks you deal with every day.

If you're looking for someone experienced, give copies of your job description to your mobile tool dealer and your parts supplier. Ask them for referrals. They have connections with other shops and know experienced people. Rather than damage their relationship with you, they'll usually only refer prospects they trust. That serves as a pre-screening function, so you can avoid wasting your time interviewing a young person who wants to work at your shop because he liked the "Fast and Furious" movies.

In fact, if you're looking for an entry-level person or part-timer, you might ask the high school auto teacher or community college or vocational school instructor to tell their best students about your job opening. You may have just the job a student like this would thrive at.

### **Getting The Help You Want With Help Wanted Ads**

Back to your help wanted ad. Writing a want ad may sound hard. But the way I look at it, someone has already done all the hard work. All you need to do is assemble the pieces. Start by looking on some of the popular job search engines like Monster.com, CareerBuilder.com, or even Craigslist.com for similar job listings, (you might use this technique to develop your job description and list of duties, too).

Print out the three or four listings your

think sound most like your opening. Take a bit from here and some things from there and add a few thoughts of your own. Pull them all together to create the working job description/help wanted ad for your situation.

Now, you can let a pro take over. Call the classified ad department at your local newspaper or fax/email them your write-up and ask for help creating a killer want ad. They write classified ads every day. You stick to headers; let them handle headlines. Once the ad runs, use the same wording in online ads on Web sites like Craigslist.com.

Some applicants will submit resumes, others will want to fill out an application. You should have some job applications on file in case. Pick up a packet of applications at a local office supply store. Or you can find hundreds of editable job apps online (Google "free employment application template"). Having a PDF or Word employment application will let you email applications to a prospective employees so they can complete and return it faster.

### **Ready To Hire? Not Quite.**

As the resumes and applications come in by mail or email, quickly look them over and store them into two stacks: "Maybe" and "Maybe Not." You'll still want to review both stacks carefully later, before you rule anyone out entirely. But this will give you a quick way to determine if you're ready to start interviewing.

Once you have enough "Maybes," you'll want to start making calls. But don't let those big stacks of paper fool you into thinking the hard work is done. The hard work has just begun.



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