

4 Proven Ways To Get a Grip on Great Retail Employees!

By Anne M. Obarski

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I love baseball. It encompasses all of the typical delightful sights and sounds of summer; sunshine, hotdogs, warm breezes and little league uniforms I can never get completely clean! You see I enjoy watching kids play baseball! There is something very special about the learning process of organized baseball that can be transferred even to the retail world. If you ever go to a little league game, you'll see that the game and the components are not very different than those of the major leagues. The players are smaller but they emulate the "big league" players. They have tough tryouts, they practice daily, they look the part, and they support their teammates. Independent retailers, like little league players, can profit by taking a few batting practices from the big league stores.

I have often been asked, "I am a small store owner, how do I compete with the big stores for great employees?" Here's my answer. First, great employees are not born they are developed in a business atmosphere where training is stressed, individuality is encouraged and personalities are respected. Word travels about the work environment in all sizes of stores. The key to recruiting quality employees is promoting and possessing a positive work environment no matter how large or small you are.

Creatively Recruit Employees

Focus on specific employment needs and develop specific job titles and descriptions for each of those positions. These criteria will be beneficial in matching an employee to a specific position. Later, in the review process, these same criteria can be used to measure accountability. This also is the groundwork for your advertising. Write several different help-wanted ads that can be positioned in various media. Be specific in your requirements. "What personality characteristics do I want and what amount of experience am I looking for?" Do I want "rookies" that will need a lot of training, or am I looking for seasoned veterans that come with valuable retail experience. Go back to your list of criteria and decide what the "have to have" items are and those that would be "great to have". Example, "Seeking associate with strong sales record and must have managerial experience." It is obvious that the candidate must have a sales and managerial background.

Compete with large stores by attracting new employees through creative advertising. The ad must reflect the positive aspects of working for your company. Something should spark their curiosity to respond to the ad. "Specialty store seeking a highly motivated person to join our creative sales team. Fun atmosphere and great benefits." One or more of the descriptive words must catch their attention to make them want to respond to the ad.

Try unique ways to advertise. Recently, I saw this sign in a jewelry store window, "If you like looking at our merchandise, you'd love selling it. Inquire inside." I had to hold myself back.

Hiring and Interviewing On Purpose

Did you know that most people spend more time with the people they work with than with their own family? As you interview, be conscious of personality traits that will be an asset or a possible hindrance to your team. Don't be afraid to ask specific questions that the candidate must answer and take notes that you can refer to later. Within the interview begin questions with the phrases; "Tell me about a specific time...." Or "Share some examples of.." or "Tell me about how you handled a difficult customer." Look for concrete examples. If you are ever questioning the decision to hire someone, ask yourself, "Would I want this person working for my competition?"

Power Training

Too often small stores overlook this important component of developing a strong retail team. I read recently that salespeople should see training as an ongoing process that will enhance their careers permanently and not just a quick fix. The cost of hiring and training a new employee can run almost 50% of the annual cost of the employee. Your incentive should be to train to retain. There are a number of great video training products that you can invest in for your employees. Invite guest speakers, send your associates to seminars, and develop a library in a break room with motivational and sales training tapes and videos they can borrow. Team development should be an on-going process and a good manager should be continually looking for ways to add to the learning process. Research has shown that money is not the number one motivational factor for employees. Regardless of what type of business, employees are looking to find a sense of belonging and where it is recognized that their work efforts make a difference in the company's success. Practice, practice, practice!

Reward, Reward, and Retain

Rewards do not always have to be monetary! Is that a surprise? It shouldn't be. A good manager knows it is important to be a cheerleader as well as a coach. You can reward all of your team players by possessing winning characteristics yourself. Motivate your employees by allowing them to make suggestions, to take risks, to fail, to be challenged and to succeed all the while knowing that you have an open door policy. Radical thinking says that the customer never comes first, the employee does! If the employee is happy in their job, if they feel appreciated and if they respect the leadership of the store, they will give outstanding customer service because they enjoy what they are doing. Reward daily. A simple compliment, a written note, a public acknowledgement at a weekly meeting are all non-monetary ways of compensating employees. Review their performance frequently, not always to add a raise, but to provide feedback for successes as well as for areas of improvement. And finally provide competitive salaries and benefit packages with specific and achievable ways to advance within the company and you'll never worry about competing with the "big leagues" again. Pass the popcorn!

Anne M. Obarski is the "Eye on Retail Performance". She is an author, professional speaker, retail consultant and Executive Director of Merchandise Concepts. Anne works with companies who are performance, profit and people focused and she helps leaders see their businesses through their customers' eyes. Anne's mystery shoppers have secretly "snooped" over 2000 stores searching for

excellence in customer service. Reach Anne at www.merchandiseconcepts.com or <mailto:anne@merchandiseconcepts.com>

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