



Creative Ways to Hire Seasonal Help

Prepare for the holiday onslaught before crunch time.

June Allan Corrigan

Do you face the same old conundrum each year? The profitable holiday season looms, but you're at loose ends pulling together extra staff to meet the rush. It could be you're going about it all wrong. There's lots of competition out there to line up the most reliable people and if there's ever a time to get creative about ways to find them, this is it.

The process doesn't stop even after you recruit the folks who are going to help deliver the profits. Following through with new hires is just as essential as finding them. Failure to successfully onboard seasonal employees could result in some dropping out of the race earlier than expected, leading to a less than jolly holiday finish.

It is possible to put together a team to go the distance, however. So suit up—Santa costume optional—and get ready to tackle the problem head-on courtesy of some timely advice from experts in the field.



Early bird gets the worm

This idea isn't even that creative. You can't wake up on November 1 and expect to have a vast pool of applicants left from which to choose. Savvy retailers started banging the gong for holiday help back in September, early October at the latest. All the experts agree on this point. The real test is when the search begins for that elusive creature: the seasonal employee.

The traditional and the off-beat

Cover all the bases. Post ads on websites like Craigslist and Indeed of course—for they are the accepted face of classifieds in most communities these days. At the same time, however, recall some traditional venues. "Consider where people gather," says Patricia Adame, Senior VP of Human Resources at



American Kiosk Management, a company that operates hundreds of kiosks and specialty retail carts across the United States and Canada. “Consider where they live, or commute or use services. Lots of times there’s a bulletin board where you can post a flyer that says you’re hiring.”

Old-fashioned you say? Well, think about it. People standing around waiting for the elevator in their apartment building might just notice your colorful, well-worded flyer posted on a bulletin board. It might start them thinking they could use some extra money around the holidays. Same goes for gym enthusiasts lacing up their shoes who notice a similar flyer on the locker room wall. Or shoppers who stop at every grocery store’s ubiquitous message center. Even if you have to pay for the privilege of posting—and it’s usually a small amount—it’s worth it, says Adame. You could interest someone you might not otherwise, someone who wasn’t even thinking about getting a temporary job.

High schools and colleges are usually a good source of employees for seasonal positions, with community college students trumping university scholars simply because the former tend to be local residents. Why risk having your hires skip out early because they’re heading home for the holidays? The pool may

Successfully Onboarding Seasonal Help

- Draw up and distribute an offer of employment letter stating their start date, pay rate, length of assignment, etc. Make sure everything is clear and upfront right from the beginning.
- Make it a conditional offer based on the person passing a background screening or drug test, whatever is needed.
- Get required I-9 and W-4 forms completed and file them with their completed application.
- Review company policies and procedures. If the list is extensive, select the most critical ones taking into account their seasonal status. Review ten to 20 policies at the most. For instance, review your harassment discrimination policies as required by law. Things they should know if they get into trouble—and the consequences. You don’t want them to get you, the employer, into trouble either. Provide copies of important policies.
- Train them how to clock in, operate the POS system and any other pieces of equipment they’ll be expected to operate.
- Introduce your store protocol and provide sales training: how to approach and greet people, specific details about products and completing sales. Develop and refine these skills as frequently as possible before the holiday crush descends.

shrink but there’s still a creative way to get plenty of reliable applicants, suggests Mike Tesler, a partner at Retail Concepts, a marketing and consulting firm that focuses specifically on the retail environment. Tesler, who also teaches retailing at Bentley University in Waltham, Massachusetts, proposes partnering with another business.



Here's how it would work. Find a business that needs help at a different time of year than you do. A summer resort would be a good example or even a ski resort that gears up after the holiday shopping rush is over. Work out an arrangement with the business owner/proprietor there. If you can offer the incentive of segueing into another job when the one at your establishment ends, it could sway a potential employee's decision to come work for you. "Partnering with another business and offering a transition—something along the lines of, 'if you do well here, I can help you get a job in ski country or down the Cape in the summer' might really appeal to high school and college kids," Tesler says.



Cast a wide net

It's all too easy in this digital age to dismiss employee applications with a keystroke. If someone's resume seems weak or their email is awkward, they are often deleted without a second thought. Doug Fleener recommends doing the opposite. "I'm a big believer in attracting as many applicants as possible," says the President and Managing Partner of Dynamic Experiences Group, a consulting firm that works with specialty retailers and other customer-focused companies.

"I think one mistake people make not just with seasonal hires but with regular hires is they try to filter people out. I'd rather meet people in person," Fleener continues. He cites an example of a gentleman who did not come across well online, and later Fleener learned English was a second language. "A lot of people would have just rejected him, but you know writing resumes and e-mails wasn't part of the job! So come to find out he's an incredibly empathetic, engaging person who I think is wonderful for the store I was consulting with at the time."

Fleener also thinks a lot of employers put too much emphasis on applicants having prior retail experience. "They'll reject people who don't have any," he says. "But I'm looking for personality. I don't need retail experience. I need people who like to talk to people." Towards that end he suggests always being on the lookout for potential employees. You might even find them among your regular customers ... someone you enjoy talking with and who is interested in your product. They're in your store, right? It doesn't hurt to inquire. "There's a lot of people who aren't even thinking about taking on a holiday job until you ask them."

Your antennae should also be out whether you're in a bank, a restaurant, anywhere where you receive good service.



Checklist for Hiring Seasonal Help

- ✓ Start your search early. September/early October at the latest.
- ✓ Utilize multiple resources to get the word out:
 - Advertise on employment websites such as Craigslist, Indeed, Glassdoor and Monster.com.
 - Leverage social media and post your sourcing needs on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, LinkedIn or wherever you have an online presence.
 - Expand your reach on social media by asking your existing workers to post about job opportunities through their own networks.
 - Reach out to job centers at high schools, colleges (particularly community colleges), senior centers, veteran associations and church groups.
 - Post flyers at pre-schools and elementary schools in hopes of reaching stay-at-home parents capable of working hours during the holiday period.
 - Contact centers for the disabled. Depending on the disability, you often can connect with many able candidates seeking meaningful work.
- ✓ Highlight any advantages you offer: flexible hours, bonus pay, commissions. Anything that sets you apart.
- ✓ Post a professionally worded and well-designed sign on your cart or kiosk—nothing hand-drawn, please! Although some experts frown on the practice saying it hints of desperation, it does get the word out to fellow mall employees who might be considering a job change or to customers strolling by.
- ✓ Post a professional flyer on bulletin boards around town where people are known to congregate: grocery stores, apartment complexes, gyms, churches and youth centers.
- ✓ Advertise on free job boards offered by the state and/or city in which you live. Depending on the community, many have viable centers that people still frequent when seeking work.
- ✓ Consider partnering with another business whose time frame for seasonal help differs from yours to see if you can institute a referral/incentive program.
- ✓ Always be on the lookout for engaging personalities and good service when going about your daily business. A seasonal employee might emerge from your own customer base or the barista who serves your latte.
- ✓ Initiate contests offering prizes among your existing employees to help you recruit seasonal help. They're often an excellent conduit to great candidates.
- ✓ Offer a competitive wage. The holiday period represents a lot of revenue and you don't want to run the risk of being short-staffed and losing sales just because a fellow retailer is offering fifty cents more an hour.





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HELP WANTED ADS THAT DELIVER

Patricia Adame at American Kiosk Management recommends getting right to the point. You never want to be misleading. “Tell it like it is so there aren’t any questions,” she says. Adame adds: “If you can promise a certain number of hours a week mention that, or say up to X amount of hours a week. And if you’re not paying competitive wages, stick with stating what you’re actually offering. Otherwise you’ll get a bad reputation. People are going to break the code eventually and they won’t even respond to your ad.”

TOY STORE HIRING SEASONAL WORKERS

November thru December.
Flexible hours available.
\$8 an hour plus bonus.

Doug Fleener at Dynamic Experiences Group advises whatever the headline is, whatever the subject, it’s got to grab people. “Words like, ‘fun,’ ‘exciting,’ ‘rewarding’ and ‘bonus-pay’ will help you stand out,” he says.

REWARDING PART-TIME POSITION WITH HOLIDAY BONUS

Toy Store Seeks Seasonal Workers
November thru December.
Flexible hours available.
\$10 an hour plus holiday bonus.

Fleener suggests paying a retainer bonus. “You want people to stay, especially in a mall situation where so much of holiday business is often condensed into that last week. You can’t afford to have people leave or cut out early. So you might have them start before Thanksgiving but pay them a bonus on January 1.”

Mike Tesler at Retail Concepts suggests alternatives to the traditional want ad. “You could invite your existing help to talk about their jobs on social media and give prizes for the most creative use of social media. And reward your help when they do help you find somebody,” he says. Of course, you should always post the fact that you are seeking seasonal employees on your company’s Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest accounts or wherever you boast a presence. But prompting your employees to spread the word about job openings through their own profiles widens your reach considerably.

You have to be discreet but you could slip the person who impressed you a business card letting them know you’re hiring. After all, you’re looking for seasonal help and who knows? The person in question might be looking to make some extra holiday cash even if they are employed full-time elsewhere.

A couple of insider secrets to remember: The majority of your customers won’t know who’s a regular employee

and who’s a seasonal one. Your job then is to make sure whoever you hire represents your company the way you want. This feat can be accomplished by making smart hiring decisions and quickly bringing your temporary employees up to speed.

Freelance writer June Allan Corrigan addresses a wide range of topics, including business, medicine, parenting and education. Visit her website at juneorrigan.com.