

Seasonal Help

101

From where to find applicants to how to train them — learn how to get the most from seasonal employees.

By Carol Hacker

It's that time of year again: Nice weather is bringing customers to garden centers across the country. The surge in sales and services that is taking place creates the need for additional staff. For many retailers, seasonal employees are lifelines to their customers who expect friendly and knowledgeable personnel to answer questions and help them make purchasing decisions.

Different businesses and locations need seasonal employees for varying lengths of time. For example, a lawn and garden center in the upper Midwest may need seasonal help for just a few months while a similar business in California or Florida may recruit employees to work for a longer period of time.



A "Help Wanted" sign is not the most effective way to recruit candidates; try multiple approaches such as advertising with local newspapers or radio stations.

Whether you are hiring for six weeks or six months, it's important to find the people who can best represent your business.

Businesses who use seasonal employees face many challenges including decisions about when to hire, how many people to hire, where to find suitable applicants and how to train and introduce new employees to the job and the business.

Evaluate Your Needs

Before you begin the process of hiring seasonal help, it is important to evaluate your specific needs. The first question to address is whether seasonal workers are appropriate for your business. Despite their importance in the workforce, seasonal employees are not the answer for all businesses. Smaller operations may prefer to rely on family members to help during the busy season. Doing so eliminates the hassle of interviewing, hiring and training someone for a need that exists for only a few months each year.

Once you decide if seasonal help is right for you, there are many more questions to consider:

- How many seasonal employees should you hire?
- Will they work full or part time?
- How many hours will they work each week?
- Are you prepared to pay for overtime hours?
- How long will you need their services?
- Will there be opportunities for permanent employment at the end of the season?
- How flexible are you in terms of work schedules?

Some businesses have found it is easier to get people to work longer hours, which means fewer seasonal employees are needed. This can translate to improved service for customers because the employees get to know repeat customers. Seasonal employees will start recognizing frequent shoppers and maybe even call them by name when they enter the store.

Improving economic conditions and stiff competition for top-notch people means that many businesses are finding it more difficult to fill seasonal job openings. Don't wait until the last minute to begin searching for seasonal staff. This can be especially important for smaller businesses that don't have human resource departments to handle recruiting. Advertise, interview, make job offers and set starting dates for hiring new employees weeks in advance of your need. ▶



EVERYTHING YOU NEED

Tags, signs, stakes, banners, and a full line of OnSyte® printers and supplies. Horticultural Marketing & Printing's 2006 Catalog has everything you need to jump-start sales and increase profits. Choose from the latest in thermal transfer printers, software, and printing supplies or order from our broad selection of off-the-shelf merchandising materials. Promote your products and give consumers the information they need to make the purchasing decision that's right for them. And get the sale that's right for you!

To place an order call (800) 433-8247 or visit our convenient online ordering system, available 24/7 at www.horticulturalprinters.com.



Horticultural
Marketing & Printing

THE LEADER IN HORTICULTURAL MARKETING

Attracting Applicants

Don't rely on a "Help Wanted" sign in your store window to recruit candidates; try multiple approaches such as advertising with local newspapers or radio stations.

Schools. Get proactive and contact high schools about student work programs that may include young adults who are interested in working part time during the school year and full time during summers and holidays. It's also a good idea to post job announcements at area colleges and universities.

Churches. Call churches and let them know you are looking for seasonal help. Many churches assist their members in finding jobs; some even offer free classes on how to do so and have a "job leads" bulletin board to post open positions. Usually there isn't a cost for this service.

Employee referrals. Think about your best employees; do they know someone who is looking for seasonal work? New hires that are referred by your current employees are often a good bet.

Former employees. Contact former seasonal employees who performed favorably and ask if they could return for another season. Even if they can't, they may be able to recommend someone who is looking for seasonal work. Even a former full-time employee may be interested in a seasonal position providing he or she is someone you would consider rehiring.

Retail employees. Some retailers have been known to walk through stores and restaurants in area shopping malls, strike up conversations and look for prospective seasonal employees — those workers who appear to be personable and customer-focused. These people are working for other retail businesses; decide how you want to approach them about working for you without coming across like a poacher. Sometimes offering a business



Posting job announcements at area high schools and universities can be a good way to find part-time help.

card accompanied with the words, "If you're ever looking for a job, give me a call," is all you need to do to get the ball rolling.

Customers. Some of your best customers can make good employees. They know your product and buy from you because they like you and the things you sell. To see if they are interested, make it known in your store that you are looking for seasonal employees to add to your team.

Competitive pay. In the search for seasonal employees, consider what your business can offer in the way of compensation. Be aware of what other area businesses offer so that you can be competitive. While seasonal jobs usually don't pay the same hourly rate as full-time, regular positions, discounts on merchandise, paid lunch breaks and the possibility of a bonus for high performance may help attract good prospective employees. This can be especially helpful if the hourly rate you're prepared to offer is not as high as that of other businesses in your community. Also, consider offering a higher rate of pay to experienced former seasonal workers to encourage them to return.

Build Your Workforce

Who you hire is more important than how you manage them once they are on the job. That is why it is important to identify the best applicants, interview them and compare them to your most successful employees. Before you put them on the payroll, look beyond what you want to see in a job applicant.

When you begin interviewing seasonal applicants, treat the matter seriously. While you may not conduct the same in-depth interview for a seasonal position that you would for a full-time position, take the time to learn about potential new employees. ▶

NEW Look for ALGOFLASH®
FLOWERING PLANTS

Spring and Summer bring a blaze of color to our gardens no matter how large or small, whether it be on a balcony, terrace, farm, or your own peaceful garden space.

ALGOFLASH® has formulated a unique 5-9-14 fertilizer specifically designed for annual and perennial flowers. Mixing one capful per gallon of water is all the nourishment your customers' flowers will need to keep their plants blooming beautifully all summer long.

New look, but same excellent fertilizer!

For more information contact:
ALGOFLASH®
 6833 Phillips Industrial Blvd. Jacksonville, FL
 32256-3029
 Tel: (904)886-9917
 (800)714-4384
 Fax: (904)886-9517
 E-mail: algoman1@aol.com

Write in 756

ATLAS GLOVE
The Original!

Like air conditioning for your hands!

Ultra Lightweight!

COOL TOUCH™
Garden Gloves

COOL!
 Breathable Palm & Finger Coating!

Breathable nylon liner & polyurethane palm coating for durable hand protection & excellent dexterity.
 Machine washable. Sizes XS, S, M, L

Ask about the **FREE** countertop display & sign with purchase of just four dozen pairs!

For an authorized distributor, call:
 800-426-8860
 or e-mail: gloves@lfsinc.com

Imported & Distributed by
ATLAS GLOVE
The Original!
 CONSUMER PRODUCTS
 A DIVISION OF LFS INC

Write in 753



NURSERY/LANDSCAPE EXPO 2006

AUGUST 18-20, 2006

PRE-EXPO EDUCATION CONFERENCE · AUGUST 17, 2006

HENRY B. GONZALEZ CONVENTION CENTER
SAN ANTONIO

www.tnlaonline.org expo@tnlaonline.org



7730 South IH-35 Austin, Texas 78745-6698 800.880.0343 512.280.5182 Fax 512.280.3012

People often fail to uncover the truth about applicants during the job interview. And although no one is perfect, getting to know applicants through the questions you ask will help you make an informed hiring decision. Ask good, thought-provoking questions and listen with full attention to the answers.

Your job as the hiring manager is to determine the applicants' weaknesses. By asking the right questions, you can find out where an applicant is weak.

This will make it easy to decide whether or not this is someone you want to hire. The time spent selecting the right seasonal employees is more important than many employers realize.

Take note of applicants' appearances and attitudes. What about experience — how important is previous retail experience? If they have a lack of experience but seem like ideal prospects in every other way, are you willing to train them? What kind of training can you offer that will be fast and efficient?

Don't forget to check their references. Many businesses don't bother to contact the applicant's previous employers especially for seasonal help. That decision can be a *HUGE* mistake! In checking references, verify the facts and solicit opinions.

Avoid The Pitfalls

As tempting as it may be to hire the first warm body that walks through the door, it's usually not a good idea. Although you may feel relief at having resolved the problem for the short term, hiring the wrong person even for a seasonal job can have long-range repercussions. A customer who is dissatisfied with your seasonal worker's attitude or lack of job skills may not bother to return and never give your business a second chance.

Building customer loyalty starts with a loyal workforce whether regular, full-time employees or temporary, seasonal employees. The loyalty factor begins with a business culture that respects and values each of its employees as well as its customers. The relationship between the two will impact the profitability of your business. Create a workplace culture by hiring the right people, training

As tempting as it may be to hire the first warm body that walks through the door, it's usually not a good idea. Although you may feel relief at having resolved the problem for the short term, hiring the wrong person even for a seasonal job can have long-range repercussions.

Deer Problems?

Super Long Lasting
Up to 3 months or more

WON'T Wash off

MINTY fresh scent

Money Back GUARANTEE

Works GREAT!

DEER OUT™
DEER REPELLENT

Safe for All Fruits and Vegetables!

Super Long Lasting!
Won't Wash Off in the rain!

100% All Natural!
Over 50,000 Repeat Customers!

To view our entire product line visit us at:
www.deerout.com

For wholesale pricelist call: (908) 769-4242

Become a Dealer:
Deer Out LLC
PO BOX 7241
Colonia, NJ 07067

SATISFACTION GUARANTEED

Write in 778

The Better Bench
Strong • Durable • Portable • Affordable

VAL-CO's Better Bench System has been designed for strength, durability and value. The Better Bench can be permanently installed or can be used as a freestanding bench. With an easy bolt together design, the Better Bench can be assembled in less time than conventional bench systems.

Optional tiered bench style is also available.

Specifications

- Bench Widths: 24", 36", 48", 72" & 96"
- Heights: 24", 30", 40"
- Lengths: Bolt together design allows for any length bench.
- 12 gauge galvanized legs and framing.
- No cross bracing required. (in most cases)
- Exceptional warranty.

2710 Division Highway,
PO Box 8
New Holland, PA 17557
Phone: 800.433.1819
Fax: 717.355.2505
Email: hortna@valcompanies.com
Website: www.valcogreenhouse.com

Don't forget to ask us about our other quality horticultural products!

VALCO

Write in 830

Going, Going, Green!

- Build an all-green selling display with all-metal No/No mesh feeders
- Designed for durability, they're squirrel damage resistant
- Forest Green finish adds decorative beauty to any back yard

The ORIGINAL, with extended roof

The 5-TIER
The LANTERN
The TRAY
The HOURGLASS

ALL METAL QUALITY
No Wood / No Plastic

Toll-Free 877-628-6115 Phone 402-373-2211
SWEET CORN PRODUCTS, LLC • P.O. BOX 487
BLOOMFIELD, NE 68718 www.sweetcornproducts.com

"NO/NO"
BIRD FEEDER™

Write in 822

them, communicating frequently and honestly, listening, empowering, emphasizing teamwork and leading by example.

Orientation And Training

Take time for a brief orientation to the business and the job. It doesn't have to be anything fancy, but it is important to help each of your employees get off on the right foot. Explain the goals and philosophy of your business. In addition, let your seasonal employees know what you expect of them in terms of performance. Don't inadvertently encourage an attitude of, "It's only a seasonal job." If you consider their jobs to be relatively unimportant, employees will quickly get the message, and they may adopt the same attitude.

Another important step when hiring seasonal employees is to provide training. Often the seasonal worker doesn't get enough guidance, especially during the first few days on the job. Someone teaches them the bare bones of operating a cash register, stocking shelves or answering the customers' questions and assumes the matter will take care of itself. This is seldom the case.

A fly-by-the-seat-of-your-pants approach to training new hires is a de-motivating action on the part of the owner or manager. While an experienced employee may handle the job with a minimum amount of training, the inexperienced worker requires extra attention. Otherwise, someone will invariably have to spend time correcting the mistakes and resolving the problems created by the employee's lack of experience and knowledge.

The employer also has to consider the amount of time spent training new employees. Training two seasonal employees may be more costly than training one full-time employee; yet, training is just as critical for the seasonal employee. Sometimes employers make the mistake of believing that because a person is a seasonal employee, it is not necessary to train him or her as thoroughly as the full-timers. However, any employee without adequate training, especially when interfacing with customers, can easily and quickly cost the business both dollars and customers.

Conclusion

Seasonal employees are an integral part of the business world today. The successful use of these

people depends in large part upon how a business applies what it learns from one season to another. Make notes about what did or didn't work well. Keep a list of experienced employees you want to contact the next time you are looking for seasonal workers. Planning

ahead can make the seasonal-employee aspect of your business easier and more profitable. ✎

Carol Hacker is a human resource consultant, seminar leader and author of 13 business books including Hiring Top

Performers-350 Great Interview Questions for People Who Need People. She can be reached at (770) 410-0517.

LearnMore!

For more information related to this article, go to www.lgrmag.com/lm.cfm/lg060608



ofa™
an Association of Floriculture Professionals
SHORT COURSE

July 8-11, 2006
Columbus, Ohio

Learn & Grow

The Second (And Third) Easiest Way To Make More Money In A Garden Center

7/8/2006; 1-2:15 p.m.

Stephen Bailey, The Garden Center Group

"While they will never be the big money producer that Margin Management is, managing Wages and Operating Expenses plays an important part in Profitability. No, we're not talking about not paying your fuel bill or cutting salaries. We're talking about comparing your center to the latest industry averages in these critical two areas. A panel discussion involving garden center owners and their specific management methods will make up the second half of this session."

- Stephen Bailey

ofa@ofa.org • www.ofa.org
614-487-1117 • Fax: 614-487-1216



Write in 838