

How to Find, Train and Keep Employees

BY DAVID KING



When I was asked to write this article, I realized how difficult this would be for me because though I *think* I know the answers, I am not always successful at following my own advice. So I will try to take you through what has worked for me — and what has not been so successful.

THE SEARCH IS ON

Given the present economy, simply just finding a person who wants to work is perceived as a difficult problem, or is it? We have tried several ways to find people: ads in the *Boston Globe* newspaper (\$650 each), radio ads (\$150 per minute), Web search companies (\$2,000-plus) and local news papers (\$350 per ad).

Interestingly, we had the best success using smaller, local newspapers, and good ol' word of mouth. We offered our employees a bonus (typically \$250-\$500) for each person they recommended to the company who we ended up hiring. This, to date, has produced the best success.

The next thing we did was to circulate flyers to all the local businesses in our town asking for help in finding people.

The third-best method was using small local newspapers that allowed us to run larger ads for much less money than the big-city papers. What you need to understand is that there are many people looking for work, and many of them are very good employees, they just need a good company and an opportunity to better themselves.

Before you run off and spend a lot of time and money trying to get new employees, you should review your present employees and make sure you are paying them what they are worth.

Now review the workload. See if you can shift the workload around to even out the workflow. After you have maximized the existing staff and determined that it is still necessary to hire someone, go ahead and spend the time and money.

Let's assume you have a number of

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résumés on your desk for the position(s). One problem you could be getting yourself into is thinking that you might have to pay more for someone without experience than you are paying your present employees. Don't fall into this mindset. Pay your employees what they're *worth*.

What most employees want is a job that allows them to be an important part of the process — this means they are respected for what they have to say, they are challenged, and they are allowed the freedom to enjoy their job and to grow with the company.

TOOLS FOR SUCCESS

Make sure that when you put a new employee into a position you provide them with the necessary tools to be successful at their job.

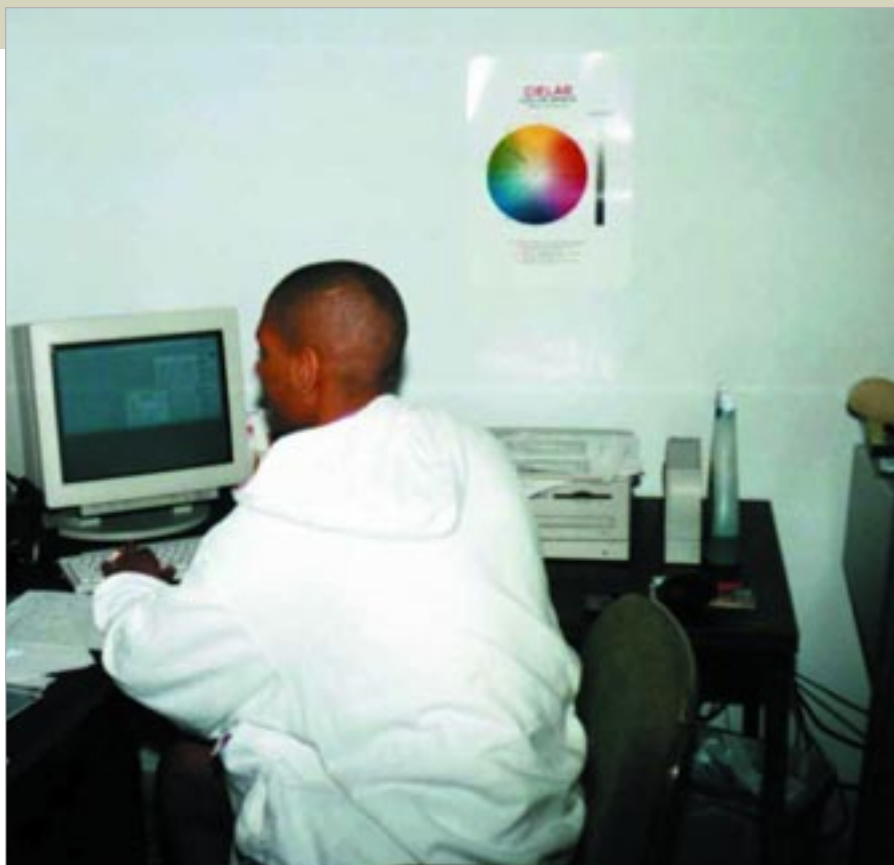
The tools I'm talking about include everything from proper equipment to proper training and instruction. If you hire a person to be a designer, for example, don't give him an old, slow computer; give him a new, fast one with all the necessary software and utilities needed to do the job right. A poor computer can make life very difficult, and could make the new person feel that they are not performing to the level you need or expect — a bad way to start things off.

Good training and proper instruction are all-too-often overlooked. Why? Because you're so busy running the company and looking after all the other details, that you think you don't have *time* to spend training someone. Think again. Isn't this why you hired the new person in the first place?

You have to *invest* in this new person, or you will not get back what you expect and need.

It's a good idea to document each of the steps in each of the processes the position requires before you hire someone to fill it.

It takes hours to create a good document of this sort, but it's well worth the time and effort and will pay handsomely in the long



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run. You'll have an unambiguous reference that *both* of you can review; one that leaves no question about what is expected of this new person.

For example: We recently hired a new person for our laminating and finish department. Before the person started I used MS Excel to enter all the products our company offers that are processed through our laminating and finish department. Then, next to each product I described in detail each step taken to create that product.

Not only did it clarify the new person's job, but it helped us to correct previously undetected workflow *errors* that were being made by the experienced employees. In addition, it provided our sales people with a good reference which they now use to explain to customers how their projects are made. Surprisingly, this document alone has helped us increase our sales by 5 percent!

After our new employee worked for a few days with more experienced people, I started working with him to see what I could do to fill in the blanks (the steps that the others did not explain properly).

Keep in mind that if an employee knows

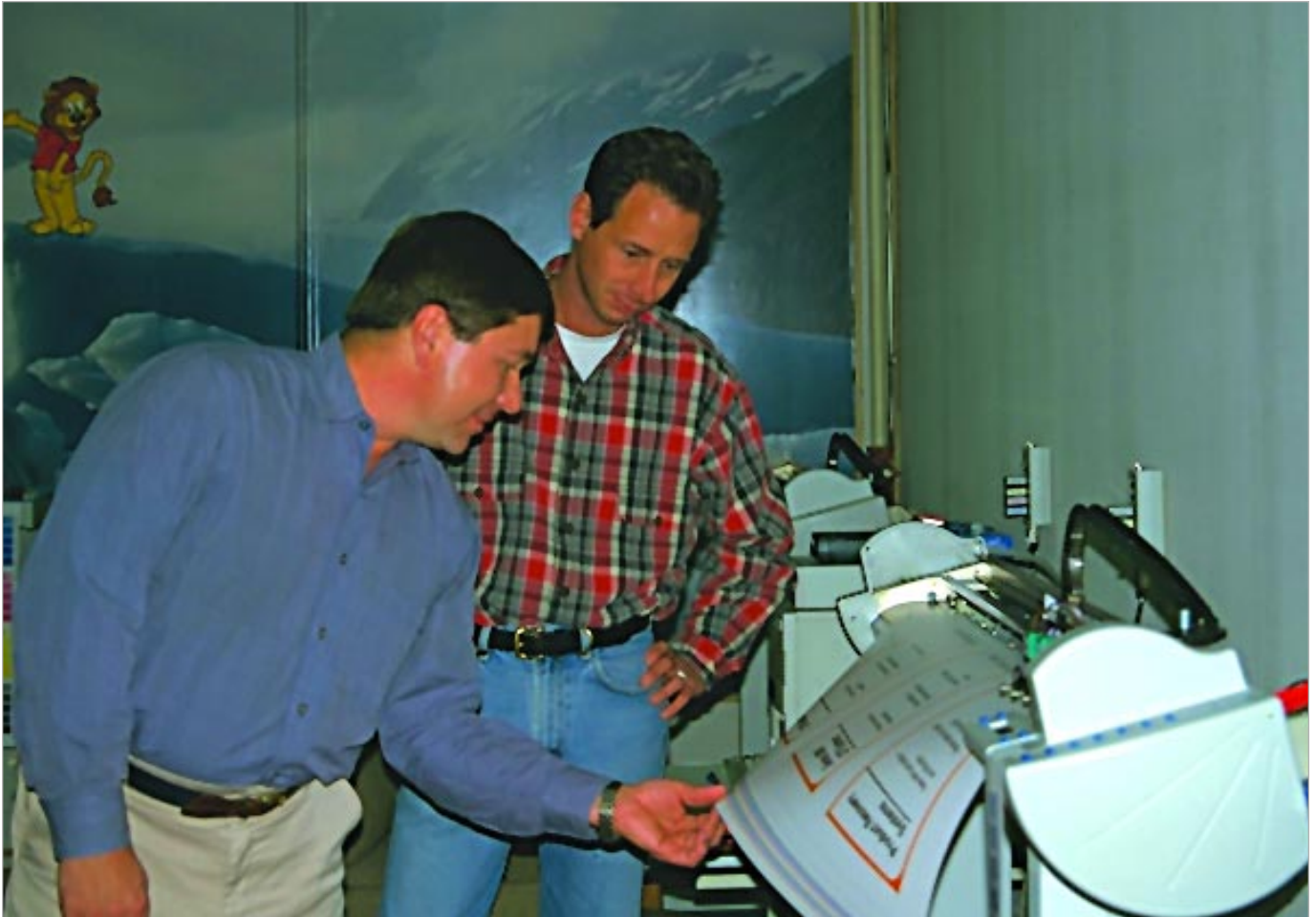
what something is used for, how it is made, and why it is made the way it is, they tend to be more conscientious about their work because they understand it!

The same rules applied for the new administrative person we hired. Again, we set up a complete set of steps and procedures for everything from the phone system to the accounting system. Everyone learns at a different pace and in different ways. All we are doing is giving them a few ways to help them become more successful at their job.

KEEPING THEM HAPPY

Now that you have your company up to speed with the right number of people, and the workload evenly distributed, how do you keep them all happy? A very good question — and as soon as you find out, *call me!*

Just kidding, but this aspect is very difficult because it is only natural for employees to want more from the company today than what they got yesterday. But it's not always about money. Sure, we *all* want more money, but before it comes to handing out cold cash, try some more creative solutions.



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We implemented a Friday BBQ lunch, where every Friday (on nice days) we have a company BBQ. All the company did was purchase a picnic table (or two), a gas barbecue, and a bunch of frozen hamburgers, hot-dogs, sausages and chicken pieces, and we kept them in the company freezer. Then, each Friday morning on the way to work, I would pickup some buns and chips for the lunch. The program is very well received.

We also purchased a few vending machines, loaded them with soda, chips, candy, gum, etc. and charged very low prices for the items. This allowed everyone to have access to cold drinks, and treats during the day and kept them from spending more of their money at the local stores.

Other little things that work well are to give out company apparel, shirts, hats and trinkets. This is great advertising for the

company and helps to make people feel more appreciated.

After a long, hard week (where everyone has put in extra hours), reward your dedicated staff with a gift check to a local restaurant. This allows employees to treat their significant other to a night out on the company, again, making them feel appreciated.

You can also implement an Employee of the Month program, where a standout employee can get the best parking spot, perhaps a gift certificate, movie pass, or even a photo on the company plaque (this only works for companies of more than 20 employees).

Stories about our company are sometimes published in magazines, so I try to get my staff in the photos. Anything you can do to make employees feel that they are part of a success story is only going to make you more successful.

This whole article might sound just fine

to you, or you might think I am crazy. That's okay, on some days I would likely agree with you.

My goal, though, is to help make you more successful — particularly those of you who care about giving your customers the best possible products and services this graphics industry has to offer.

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