

A HAND-PICKED TEAM

Owners should take an interest in hiring process

BY MARY TERESA BITTI

Salad Creations, a growing global healthy-food restaurant chain, doesn't just look at resumé when hiring staff. Brenda Bot, Salad Creations' master developer in Canada, also employs a behaviour psychology assessment developed by the U.S. head office to determine whether potential new hires will fit Salad Creations' culture.

"Everything we do here is about giving customers an entire Salad Creations experience," Ms. Bot says. "To apply for a position, managers and salad chefs fill out an application and then we have a three-step process before we hire."

First candidates fill in a questionnaire comprised of behavioural and situational questions. For example: You're travelling to work and your transportation breaks down, which action do you take? Do you call a co-worker and ask them to work your shift? Do you call the store manager and explain why you can't work? Do you call the store manager and try to find alternative transportation? Do you try and fix the problem and then call the store manager?

If they score well, they move on to a building-blocks test that assesses their problem solving skills. "This is unique to Salad Creations," Ms. Bot says. "We use this test for chefs, managers and franchisees. It allows us to evaluate a candidate in a stressful situation because it's timed."

Step 3 is the interview, where candidates are asked five questions geared toward determining future performance. In an industry with typically high turnover, Ms. Bot says this process works. "When hiring for our flagship store in Toronto in January 2008, we used the process and those employees are still with us. When we didn't use the process because we needed



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Brenda Bot of Salad Creations in Canada uses behaviour psychology to vet new hires.

to get bodies in quickly, we haven't been as successful in keeping those candidates."

Hiring right is critical especially in this economic environment. "Very few companies have extra cash or resources to spend on staff who are not going to add value," says David King, executive vice-president of staffing services firm Robert Half International. HR costs and payroll costs are the biggest expenses for most organizations. We've surveyed CFOs about how they stay ahead of the competition in this challenging economy and 65% said it was by having the best team in place. For a small company with a small head count this is even more important."

He breaks down the steps small business owners should take to hire right:

- Determine what it is you are trying to achieve. In many cases, companies look at the job the previous person did in the role and just use that to find another person to do the job. It is important to know the right combination of skills, experience and knowledge you

need to ensure that person adds value and enhances the bottom line. You want to hire someone who is in line with the company's objectives.

- Look around, don't just rush to fill a role. Instead, think of this as an opportunity to see who is available in the market and who would enhance the company — not just fill a spot.

- Prepare a workload forecast rather than just looking to past expectations for the role. What is coming up? Is the company retrenching or going into a new area? Do you really need a fulltime person? Project specific and contract work is trending up, and will grow even further in the future. The thought of going traditional and simply hiring full time people for every role in the company has become passé.

- Evaluate your current staff. You may have someone who is

ready and wants to move up. Promoting from within is a great way to retain staff.

- Put together a job description that includes a clear job title, primary and secondary responsibilities for the role, as well as the core competencies, experience, compensation and education required.

- Screen resumé thoroughly and look for red flags: lack of stability, lack of advancement, gaps in work history, any ambiguity. These can indicate problems in the applicants past jobs. Once you've determined a candidate has the skills necessary, ask about other areas such as what motivate that person, how she problem solves, etc. This may provide insight you can't get from the more traditional questions and will help better determine how the person would fit with your team.

- Have managers do reference checks instead of hiring a recruiting or screening agency to do them. It is an opportunity to get a sense of how you can best work with and motivate who you hire.

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