



HIRING AND HIRING

Six tips for SMEs dealing with a talent shortage

In 2014, Frog Recruitment director Jane Kennelly teamed up with The Icehouse business accelerator, speaking to over 700 employers across New Zealand. One outcome was the recently-released e-book, *Hiring and keeping good staff: A seven step guide*, designed to dispel some employment myths and help SMEs level the playing field for top talent against the big budget corporates.

Nikki Mandow took six tips from the book.

TIP 1: PLAN YOUR WORKFORCE

All too often companies know talent is hard to find, but instead of planning ahead, they react to each vacancy as it occurs, meaning positions can take weeks, if not months, to fill.

Workforce planning involves connecting staff recruitment and retention with your overall strategic planning. Set aside time each year to forecast your people needs against planned projects.

TIP 2: HIRE WHEN YOU FIND SOMEONE

Top talent is scarce, and high calibre individuals enter and exit the job market over a matter of days. This means companies need to shift from the traditional model of only hiring when they have a vacancy, to a continuous hiring model, where they are ready to take on a really good person should he or she come across their radar screen.

Start by identifying the “must have” roles in

your company where there are significant skills shortages, and then gear your hiring process so it can begin immediately if the right person comes onto the market. OK, so you might have additional salary costs for a period of time, but you avoid the problems and costs involved in searching for the right person, employing the wrong person, or having a position empty for months.

TIP 3: IDENTIFY HIGH-POTENTIAL EMPLOYEES

According to an article in the *Harvard Business Review* in June 2014, the secret to success in today’s hiring environment is being able to spot “high potentials” – staff who consistently and significantly outperform their peer group.

This isn’t as easy as it might sound. For a start, most companies measure performance, not potential, so attributes and behaviours that characterise high potentials – like a better

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ability to manage change or a greater learning capability – might go unnoticed. In addition, most organisations don’t articulate the attributes and competencies they value in their ideal employees, so managers don’t know what to look for in identifying future talent.

TIP 4: FOCUS ON RETAINING TOP TALENT

Some ideas for retaining your best staff include:

Know their expectations (for example in terms of career development, support, ongoing challenges and variety).

Provide challenging and stimulating work and opportunities to learn and develop.

Let them know what career development plans you have for them and what opportunities are available for them to grow within the company.

Offer flexibility and work-from-home options.

Focus on training and equipping your managers as coaches. Often employees don’t quit their jobs or companies, they quit their managers.

Communicate directly and clearly. Good employees want to please, but they need to know what they need to do.

Recognise and reward good work. Monetary bonuses are nice, but recognition of a job well done creates good will and loyalty. Note: make recognition specific. “Good job” is acceptable, but “Good job on the Nelson project” is better.

TIP 5: COMPANY CULTURE MATTERS

Jane Kennelly says that having spoken to thousands of career seekers, the one thing universally in common is the desire to work in an organisation that has a positive culture and is a place people are proud to be working for.

And this is not just the domain of big-name companies. Many New Zealand SMEs are winning the culture race because they act with heart, and their purpose is clear (see “Shifting the Titanic, next page”).

TIP 6: WIN THE CUT AND THRUST

Top candidates may well receive more than one job offer, so make sure yours is the most attractive. This means being tuned into a potential employee’s job acceptance criteria, and being adept at articulating a compelling job offer.

Use employee benefits as a way of bolstering your offering, particularly if you are competing with other companies. Benefits (not to be confused with incentives, which are different and mostly performance-based) are a powerful way to encourage new people to join your business. So flaunt your company pension scheme, private health insurance or childcare vouchers. <

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