

Top hiring tips for SMEs

 By [Catherine Wijnberg](#)

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The success of small businesses is far more dependent on the performance of key staff than in larger organisations, yet small businesses often struggle with effective human resource management, especially when it comes to recruitment of new staff.



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The reasons for this are two-fold. Firstly, in many cases the financial cost of hiring a qualified human resource manager is simply not justified in a small team. Secondly, as most small- and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) start with a tiny team and grow organically, the first employees are likely to be family or a close-knit, cohesive team of like-minded people who 'manage themselves.' It is only as the business grows and needs to expand its work-force that staff issues become a challenge, and greater attention is placed in this area.

Hiring the right people is important in any organisation, but for a small business it's critical since one staff member can literally make or break the company. Sound familiar? Fortunately there are some practical and effective ways to manage these HR issues in a small or growing business.

Consider the following:

1. A is for Attitude. Skills are important, but the real driver of results is attitude, so carefully probe and test the person's attitude to work, to life and to daily challenges. You can do a lot with a person who has a 'can do attitude' even if they lack certain skills, but very little with someone who has good skills but is lazy, obstructive and sits back waiting for life to happen.
2. Small business owners and managers are notorious for being micro-managers, reluctant to release staff to take full responsibility for their work. If this is true in your company, think twice about hiring expensive, ambitious team members who will be frustrated at their inability to really progress, and whose true value will be curtailed through micro-management.
3. Seek to match employees to company culture. Experienced recruiters know that a key factor in successful corporate placement is a match of temperament or working style with company culture; in an SME this is even more important. Look for someone who will 'fit in' to the workforce and the workplace. For example, if you have a fun-loving, joke-filled and relaxed office culture and team, avoid hiring someone who is uptight, serious and easily offended!
4. Interview on-site and more than once. I view recruitment as 'match-making'; and I'd much rather know the true colours of a new staff member in the dating phase than make an alarming discovery after the wedding! For this reason multiple interviews, and by more than one staff member, are a good idea.
5. Have the Labour Law bulldogs go through your staff systems and processes. This means ensuring all the paperwork is in place for contracts and job descriptions, and you have simple but effective processes for induction, performance management and dispute resolution. Being fully compliant with the labour law is not only a legal requirement, but will strengthen your confidence and improve your ability to find, work with and manage your staff.
6. Check the details. The expression 'the devil is in the detail' is never more true than in staff recruitment, so make sure

that you check references properly. I once came across a self-confessed murderer who was seeking work with a completely false (and very appealing) CV, that gave a glowing account of his work experience as a chef and personal assistant - when in fact he had spent this time behind bars! Imagine if he'd been employed by a family who had not bothered to check his references?

7. Can they do the job? The work environment in an SME often requires people to think fast, act rapidly and work smart. Finding people with these skills at an affordable cost can be really tricky so before you hire, carefully ascertain if the level of work competence the person claims to have, is backed by performance. Too often prospective employees claim 'management capabilities' where in reality they have only been pen-pushers and paper-shufflers in a long corporate chain of people blindly following orders.
8. Test their skills. I am constantly surprised at the poor applied skills of young South Africans - even university graduates seem to lack basic computer skills. If this is important in the job why not set them a test, or find one they can do online to measure their level of competency? You may decide to hire someone with good attitude and train up their skills, but there is nothing worse than assuming a level of skill and then being disappointed.
9. Try before you buy. Our labour laws are very much in favour of the employee, so make the most of all the options to ensure you really have the right person before you hire. Internship is a great way to try out young blood - a six-month internship (for example through the GAP programme www.gogap.co.za) provides an excellent opportunity to identify skills or try new things in the business before you make a long-term hiring commitment.

The enjoyment and success of running a small business is directly proportional to the quality and cohesion of your team of staff. Whilst few if any business owners are HR specialists, focussing some attention on this area is important if you want to succeed in the long term.

ABOUT CATHERINE WIJNBERG

Catherine Wijnberg is the Director and Founder of the Fetola Foundation (www.fetola.co.za)

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