

Managing Employees

The Key to Success

By Jason Dittelman

Over the years I have had the duty of hiring, firing, and supervising our production framing company's employees. I have also found that the key to any healthy company—framing and non-framing alike—is having good, reliable employees. Finding and handling them properly makes it much more likely to make your business strong, efficient, and profitable.

Hiring

When it comes to finding good employees, we've had luck recently by advertising on www.Craigslist.com. It's a free service compared to the \$200 charged for five lines in the Sunday edition of our daily statewide paper. Many local papers do offer economical rates and can get your message out, however. Word of mouth also works. Letting our friends and associates know when we are looking for good help has proven helpful. This includes talking to local merchants and telling them that you're hiring. You may luck out and find the right person from their overflow.

When it comes to interviewing, I tend to talk too much and try to sell our company as a great place to work. Listening is actually more important, especially when you ask about an applicant's past and future goals and passions. This can bring out information about a candidate's potential longevity at the company. I've also found it valuable to have my key employees interview applicants because it can lead to additional insights into a person's personality and likelihood of success.

Hiring someone with a potential for quality and staying power is my primary goal. I especially like to find Eagle Scouts from local Boy Scout troops. These are outstanding young people who hold themselves to a higher mark. A resume with a history of job-hopping, on the other hand, can mean that person might move on just after proper training has been done. Hiring artists can also be tricky, as they tend to be more creative than productive in a back room.

Once we select the best candidates, a good tool we use to help select the best is the Wonderlic Personnel Test (www.wonderlic.com), a simple 12-minute multiple-choice test. The higher the score, the better the person's ability to deal with daily work challenges.

Starting on the Right Foot

After you have made your decision and have the new person onboard, let that new employee know all the rules upfront. This saves misunderstandings that can lead to a lot of unproductive work time. The more that can be agreed upon upfront, the better. Even after making a new

hire, we've found that a trial period allows you to release bad hires without serious repercussion. We can usually tell in about two weeks if our choice was a good one.

A happy employee is a productive one. When you try at all times to instill a sense of pride in your workers, great things happen. Nurture your staff whenever possible, making sure to notice and acknowledge the good things they do. Offer incentives for a job well done, such as small gifts; these can work wonders if used properly.

Think Positive

There will inevitably be bad things to discuss, but a regular diet of negativity leads to no good. When pointing out an employee's faults, I've always found it helpful to make

an emotional deposit before making a withdrawal. In other words, start by saying something positive about the person before discussing the issue at hand. And when problems do arise, it's never useful to reprimand an employee in front of a co-worker. Instead, always take him aside to talk. No one likes to be scolded in public. And if an employee is a good employee who has just made a mistake, public criticism might end up giving him a reason to look elsewhere for a job.

Some employers shy away from hiring a trained employee with less than stellar recommendations from previous employment. There's no real way of knowing if the issue was with the employee or the former employer. Or perhaps it was just a mismatch. Many times I've found that giving someone a second chance in a new shop that

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offers a nurturing environment can work.

It's also important to keep an open mind about employees. Once I hired a deaf girl. Then the staff complained that she was going to be difficult to give instruction to. But we all learned a little sign language, and she also read lips. Everything worked out great. One day we noticed some missing product and felt there was a dishonest employee. Stuff kept disappearing until about 10 days later when the deaf employee gave the manager a note suggesting that a particular employee should be watched. We did, and caught him taking merchandise. I don't believe she actually saw anything, but I do think that deaf people have certain heightened sensibilities about people, and she felt something in this employee that was wrong.

When training new employees, keep in mind that introverted staff members usually don't make good trainers. I once hired a person who worked out great—until I asked her to train a new hire. She quit! She only came back to work after we came to an understanding that she wouldn't have to train anyone. It was my fault for putting her in that situation in the first place. I should have been more sensitive to her needs and personality.

Building Teamwork

Regular meetings are also important to maintaining a well-run framing operation. They don't have to be long

and drawn out. For example, we have free lunch Fridays where pizza and soda are provided. Anything that needs to be discussed is reviewed at that time. It's very informal, but the communication that takes place is very helpful in ironing the little problems that invariably arise at any production framing facility.


One of our biggest problems is improper or incomplete instructions for a job. If an employee has to come and ask what a particular order needs, then you (or whoever has responsibility for providing instructions) have failed. For example, telling someone to do a job just like the last one is not a proper way to give instructions.

The most important thing in any company is a good boss. When you treat your employees with compassion and understanding and don't abuse your power, they will work harder and be more loyal. Employees aren't perfect, and neither are bosses. A little understanding of that fact goes a long way and helps morale.

By following these basics, you can develop a good work atmosphere and create a team of workers who are more likely to be conscientious, reliable, and efficient. And for any production framing operation, that's like money in the bank. ■

Jason Dittelman is the owner of Crestar Manufacturing, a production framing facility in East Greenwich, RI.

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