

**Time to Hire?**Target Your Recruiting Efforts

*by John Tschohl, Founder and President, Service Quality Institute - February 12, 2013*

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The economy is improving, your business is growing, and you find yourself moving into hiring mode. It's an exciting prospect, but it's also one that brings challenges. The major challenge, of course, is hiring the right people.

I've said this more than a million times during the past 30 years, but it bears repeating: Customer service skills are the most important skills an employee can have. Why? Because exceptional customer service will drive your business and give you an edge over your competitors. It follows that, in order to provide that service and grow your business, you must arm yourself with employees who genuinely enjoy working with people, who enthusiastically meet the challenges of helping customers make informed purchasing decisions and solving their problems.

In order to hire that type of employee, it's imperative that you target your recruiting efforts. The first step is to look around you. Who are the top performers in your organization? I define top performers as employees who show up on time, are dedicated, have a great attitude, are enthusiastic, and deliver results.

There's an old saying: Birds of a feather flock together. That is true of your top-performing employees, and it's something for you to consider when recruiting new hires. It's a sure thing that your top performers' family members and friends have the same work ethic as they do, so ask them to refer potential employees to you.

Many organizations offer a financial bonus to employees who refer others to you—and you should do likewise. It doesn't have to be a huge amount, but it should be significant enough to motivate them to recruit for you. Some organizations, for example, pay the referring employee \$100 and also give \$100 to the new hire. Create an attractive incentive program to help your current employees recruit your future employees.

Many organizations overlook senior citizens when recruiting—and that is a big mistake. Many seniors are retired and looking for jobs to help supplement their incomes and to keep them active. They have experience and often have the patience required to deal effectively and successfully with customer issues. They don't view being polite and helping customers as demeaning. They grew up in a time where hard work was valued. They dressed up, showed

up, and were committed to doing the best job possible every day.

Finally, look to your competitors and companies you do business with. When you are alerted to, or spot, an employee who has the attitude and customer service skills you value, slip her your business card and ask her to call you. Have your radar up and working wherever you are—getting coffee at Starbuck's, having your oil changed, or buying a sweater at Macy's. When you find a winner, steal him!

The interview process is, of course, a critical element of the hiring process. It's important that, once you narrow down your list of potential new hires, you have more than one person interview each applicant. Disney World has a novel—and successful—approach to hiring. They pull their best employees in the department for which they are hiring and let them select the final candidates during 45-minute interview sessions. Those employees “recruit in their own image,” Disney says.

It's also important that, before you make a job offer, you check the employment records and references of anyone you plan to hire. Not everyone is as honest as you are. You need to be sure a potential employee has the education and work history he says he does. If he has embellished anything, he's not the type of person you want to employ.

Recruit and hire people who have the attitudes and personalities you need to provide your customers with exceptional service. Then train them in the technical skills, turn them loose—and watch your business grow!

John Tschohl, the internationally recognized service strategist, is founder and president of the Service Quality Institute in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Described by USA Today, Time, and Entrepreneur as a “customer service guru,” he has written several books on customer service and has developed more than 26 customer-service training programs that have been distributed throughout the world. John's monthly strategic newsletter is available online.