

How to be a Boss

Check out these tips for hiring your first employee.

@hgivner: Luv your ES column! My biz is jamming, am so busy I can't handle all the work myself. Ready 2 hire my first employee. Any advice?
Candace, Independent Planner, LA

I got this Twitter message last month (though Candace asked me not to list her Twitter handle). My first response was, how great is it that people are so busy again? My second response was that hiring is not the only solution to being super busy. Candace could instead use this as an opportunity to raise her rates, be more selective in the kinds of clients and events she takes on, etc. The buzz she'd create by turning away clients because she's so "in demand" will do wonders for her reputation. Because make no mistake, hiring an employee will change the nature of her business in many ways, some of which she may not anticipate. But if she still wants to move forward in becoming a boss, here are some tips to doing it right.

1. HIRE SOMEONE TO REPLACE THE LOWEST PAYING PART OF YOUR JOB. You know the phrase "chief cook and bottle washer," which describes how entrepreneurs often have to do everything? You want to hire someone to do the bottle washing part. Make a list of the main jobs you do in your business (sales, marketing, event operations, administration, etc.) and next to each one list approximately how many hours a week you spend doing it, and what you think the market salary or hourly rate is for someone to do that task. Your first hire should be the lowest one, because that's the cheapest way for you to free up some of your time. Your goal is to then shift that time toward the highest paying part of your job, which presumably is working with your clients.

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2. ALLOCATE TIME TO MANAGE YOUR EMPLOYEE. You've got to factor in time to interview, train, coach and manage them. And the more time you put in teaching someone how you want them to do something, the less time you'll spend putting out fires if they mess it up later.

3. CREATE A DETAILED JOB DESCRIPTION. List the tasks and responsibilities this person will have. This will not only help with accurate recruiting and interviewing, but will also serve as an outline for your training and a benchmark for performance evaluation later.

4. DOCUMENT YOUR TRAINING PROCESS IN WRITING. This is one thing I got right when I ran my own event company. This is an investment the first time around, but when you hire additional staff, it provides two great benefits: (a) It saves you a ton of time, and (b) It

ensures consistency in how your staff gets trained. Here are some examples of the types of things I wrote down and gave to new hires for us to review together:

A. INFORMATION ABOUT THE COMPANY. I wrote a short script for people to learn how to explain what we do and the key points I wanted them to convey. This should include a list of Frequently Asked Questions and suggested responses.

I'd even give them an oral test on this before allowing them to answer the phone.

B. INSTRUCTIONS ON REPEATABLE TASKS. This includes step-by-step procedures for things like running reports, doing inventory, creating a timeline, etc.

C. INFORMATION ABOUT COMPANY BENEFITS AND POLICIES. How many vacation days do I get? How many hours a week do I work? What happens if I work all weekend on a job; do I get Monday off? What's the travel reimbursement policy? It's best to write the information down. They don't have to be perfect; you can always change them.

5. PROVIDE FREQUENT AND CLEAR FEEDBACK. Most new bosses are reluctant to criticize their new hires, and instead let things go. They eventually either learn to tolerate mistakes, or it builds up and the only criticism is "you're fired." This helps no one. Employees need your feedback. If they're doing something wrong, tell them immediately. Likewise, if they're doing it right, give them a pat on the back acknowledging it.

6. BE THEIR BOSS, NOT THEIR FRIEND. I'm sure this will be the one area I get the most hate mail on, but eight out of the 10 bosses in this industry I polled for this column are just that—they're bosses. The other two like to be buddy-buddy with their staff and like to think they're all one big happy family. I'm not saying you need to be a mean boss, but rather that if you become too friendly with your staff, it eventually compromises your ability (and backbone) to give disciplinary feedback and to push them to achieve superior results.

It's far more important that your employees respect you than like you. It may make your stomach turn to see them clam up when you approach them at the water cooler, knowing that it's you they were gossiping about, but in the end it's what's best for your business.

In my next column, I'll talk about how to handle an employee who's not working out. **es**

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