

How to Recruit & Hire the
Best & the Brightest of
Today's First-time Workers

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About the Author

Mel Kleiman is an internationally recognized authority on recruiting, selecting, and retaining hourly employees. His expertise is based on more than 25 years of practical experience as well as research and consulting work for hundreds of clients.

Today, Kleiman is president of Humetrics, a leading developer of systems, training processes, and tools for hiring the best hourly workforce. He is best known for his insightful approaches to hiring and retaining the best employees and for the keynote and educational presentations, seminars, and training workshops he delivers for association meetings and corporate clients worldwide.

Kleiman has been featured on CNN Headline News and has several books to his credit including *Hire Tough, Manage Easy; Recruit Smarter, Not Harder; 267 Hire Tough Interview Questions*; and *How to Build a Magnetic Culture*. His articles have appeared in hundreds of trade journals, human resource magazines, and association newsletters.

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I. Introduction

The largest cohort of potential first-time workers we've ever seen began entering the American work force about 1996 and will continue until 2018. This generation, usually referred to as Generation Y, Echo Boomers, the Millennium Generation or Net Gen, differs vastly from those that preceded it in just about every important way, which is why you need to assimilate and apply the information contained in this report if you want to attract and hire the best and brightest of these.

Roughly pegged as those born between 1978 and 2000, this group is estimated to be more than three times the size of Generation X and constitutes more than 21 percent of our current population. At its peak, Gen Y will outnumber Baby Boomers and its size is expected to increase at twice the rate of the overall population until 2010.

The number one challenge employers face today is how to develop and maintain the kind of workplace where Gen Y wants to work.

II. Meet Today's First-Time Workers

The Face of the Future

As their parents and grandparents exit the workplace stage left, this huge new generation is entering or poised to enter stage right. Most are now adolescents. One in three is not Caucasian. One in four comes from or presently lives in a single-parent family home.

Three out of every four have mothers who work outside the home.

Gen Y members are growing up in more varied environments than any generation before them and this has, in part, shaped their characters and views. According to the United Nations Center for Population, our population's origins today are so diverse that more

than 100 languages are spoken in school systems in New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Fairfax County, VA.

That said, regardless of whether they grew up in the suburbs, inner city, ranch or farm, Gen Y's appear to have been universally and profoundly influenced by common experiences that helped shape their attitudes toward work and life. Among these: a boom and bust economy, the massacre at Columbine High School, 9/11, and the war against Iraq.

Gen Y's: Technically Savvy, Demanding Consumers

The importance of staying in touch and being able to communicate immediately for this generation cannot be overstated. Look around you. What do you see? Young people talking on cell phones always kept within easy reach.

In addition, Gen Y's are the most technically savvy, computer literate group of workers the world has thus far seen. They feel universally connected to their peers through chat rooms and e-mail that let them communicate with friends across the globe and across the street. Gen Y's are electronically connected both to each other and to a world in which knowledge doubles every 3.7 years, is transmitted in a split second and is equally available to all. They thrive on immediate feedback and seem to be constantly on fast forward.

Gen Y's grew up in a digital world so advanced it makes Gen X look like horse-and-buggy users. Fifty-six percent of today's teens have a PC at home; 85 percent use computers at school. The Internet and technology are integral to Gen Y life.

Not surprisingly, most Gen Y's are stimulus junkies. The world they grew up in and take for granted has 300 TV channels, 150 radio channels, virtually unlimited video games,

cell phones that can take and transmit photos instantly, and TiVo. Gen Y grew up in a brand-conscious, media-saturated environment that molded them into demanding consumers who received more than 3000 advertising messages every day during their formative years. To put this in perspective, that's more than their grandparents experienced during their entire lives!

Most Gen Y members began tapping computer keys well before their parents learned to master Windows. They routinely use the Internet for school research, to find information on a myriad of topics they might or might not want to discuss with their parents, to play games, download music, meet people, and shop. Whether on the Internet, watching cable TV, at the mall, attending sporting events or sitting in school, Gen Y's expect advertisers to come to them. (As we'll discuss later, this affects the methods you use to attract them to your workplace.)

The kinds of ads to which Gen Y responds favorably may be humorous, ironic or bluntly honest, but they never, ever imply that the advertisers know them better than they know themselves. By and large, this group reacts far less favorably than did their parents to products promoted by huge image-building campaigns.

Many Gen Y's care less about who wears a particular brand of athletic shoes than they do about how well the shoe manufacturer treats its workers.

More Discretionary Income than Ever Before

Gen Y's also have more discretionary income than any generation before them—and they spend most of it outside of parental control. On average, Gen Y teens enjoy an income greater than \$70 week, more than half of which is discretionary.

Nearly half of all teens earn money doing odd jobs. Almost one-third hold part-time jobs while more than 10% hold fulltime jobs. Most of them receive money from parents as needed, as gifts from others and as allowances. Gen Y's spend a good deal of their time and most of their discretionary income at malls, leaving behind them some \$175 billion annually, most of it in cash. According to the Center for Media Management, 67% of teens and 37% of children who have Internet access research or buy products online, often using cyber accounts at vendors selected by their parents or paying with prepaid credit cards their parents provide. As more Gen Y's acquire credit cards, look for them to start spending more money online.

Generational Work Ethic

Gen Y appears to express a very strong work ethic but with little respect for titles and hierarchy. They value equitable treatment for all, which causes them to care whether overseas workers receive a fair wage and drives their responses in the workplace.

Gen Y's expect to make career changes. They won't change jobs randomly or capriciously, but they usually have an overarching vision of how they want their lives to be and prefer jobs that fit into their overall plans. Most want good hours, a positive work environment and work that provides opportunities for expanding knowledge and skills.

As the generations before them, some are into drugs, gangs and truancy and lack respect for authority.

Strong Work Values That Differ From Parents'

Gen Y expects to earn money on its own terms. In addition to fair and equitable work treatment for all, they value job flexibility which respects individual needs and seek jobs that fit into their overall career plans.

A percentage of this group hasn't worked outside the home as yet, but has developed a strong work ethic because their families value education highly. They've heard, "Don't go to work yet, school is the most important thing you can do right now," for their entire lives. Also, because most Gen Y parents work, their children have had to develop skills and become responsible at an early age.

Many of the best Gen Y's lead over-programmed lives crammed with school, sports and other extracurricular activities that don't allow them the time to hold a job. Though they may come to the workplace at a slightly older age than other generations, they bring with them the same strong value structure.

Raised by Baby Boomers who value education highly, Gen Y appears to believe continued learning is the key to success and accept lifelong education as a fact of life:

- 86% of this generation will graduate from high school.
- 90% of high school seniors expect to attend college and more take college prep courses than ever before.
- 70% believe college is necessary to meet their career goals and expect to work in professional jobs
- 40% of college freshman expect to get their master's degree
- Over 75% will hold jobs before they are 18 years old

III. Recruiting & Hiring the Best First-timers

Develop a Workplace Where Gen Y Wants To Work

In order to successfully recruit, hire and retain the best of this generation, you must first understand the motivators that drive them, know where they hang out, what turns them on and off and their sources of news and entertainment.

The “A” players of every generation want to play on “A” teams and work for companies with values that align with their own. This is especially true of Gen Y, which, as we have seen, appears to be the most socially conscious, altruistic generation since the 1960s. More than 70% of respondents in a recent survey said that they would approve of and support a family member’s interracial marriage. It’s also the most cross-cultural, multi-colored, socially tolerant group (including tolerance for people with disabilities) of global citizens ever born.

Gen Y grew up hearing they could make a difference in the world and believed what they heard—its members devote time to good causes in record numbers. Their altruism carries over to work; it’s almost as if they want to be paid volunteers rather than paid employees. Gen Y holds a surprising number of views in common with members of the Mature generation who are their grandparents.

- First, they want a balance between work and life and for their work environment to be fun—hardly surprising as Gen Y spends most of its income on fun
- They want to feel that what they do matters, that it makes a positive difference in the world
- They hold lofty personal and financial goals
- They’re looking for good value propositions, not lifetime security or lifetime employment with any one company
- They value forthright, sincere communication and want to know why they are being asked to do things
- They can be managed by influence but not through orders
- They have little respect for the chain of command concept

- In the workplace, they want respect, friendly co-workers, fair bosses, sensible rules, positive relationships, personal acknowledgment and benefits, truly flexible hours, reimbursement for tuition expenses, and interesting work.

How well-prepared is your organization for this generation of workers? Do you and your managers:

1. Make sure employees know what is expected of them at work?
2. Make sure employees have the equipment and materials they need to do their jobs?
3. Provide employees with the opportunity to do what they do best every day?
4. Make an effort to recognize and praise employees who do good work on a regular basis?
5. Make sure that employees know you care about them?
6. Encourage your people to grow and develop?
7. Let employees know their opinions count?
8. Explain your company's values and mission and why what employees do is important?
9. Ensure that all employees are committed to doing quality work?
10. Help new employees develop a friend at work?
11. Review employees' performance and provided feedback at least every six months?
12. Provide employees with a safe place to work?

Finding Gen Y's Best Employees

The first part of this report described what the best of Gen Y looks like and identified some of the things its members value. Before you apply this information to your hiring process, hold a mirror up to your company, consider what you see and decide what you need to do to increase your effectiveness in hiring and retaining this generation.

Your first step is to determine what your ideal employee looks like. If what you want in an employee differs from what Gen Y is willing to provide, you will need to find a specific group from that generation that's willing to work for you.

And if you can't find such a group, then you must change your prototype for the kind of employee you seek, acknowledge that Gen Y isn't going to work for you, and look for the employees you need elsewhere or lower your standards.

Now, if Gen Y appears to be a possible source of good employees for you, then identify the hiring pool you want. Do you want high school students who can work after school and on weekends? Students who can work 30 hours a week? Recent high school or college grads willing to work full-time?

What skills do you need, what kind of personality traits, mental and physical capacities, and attitudes are required? Do you need people who are outgoing and verbal or people who are quieter and have technical skills?

Will Your Jobs Appeal?

Can you list five to ten reasons Gen Y would want to work for you? Will the jobs you have to offer appeal to this generation of first-time workers? Will your jobs meet both Gen Y's needs—and yours? If not, can you find a specialized hiring pool within this generation or make your jobs more appealing to the applicants you want?

Be aware that your competition for great employees has changed dramatically during the past few years. Ten years ago you might have found a 16-year-old with great computer skills willing to flip hamburgers, bag groceries or wait on retail customers for you.

Today, that 16-year-old is more likely to begin work at a computer help desk for \$17-per-hour! Ask yourself: "Why would Gen Y's want to work for us?"

Now review the list below and see how many of these workplace characteristics you can offer.

Why Would Gen Y Want To Work For You?

Ask your present young workers why they chose to work for you, why they stay, and what you could do to improve their jobs. Then ask yourself how many of the following your company offers:

- √ **Fun work environment**
- √ **Flexible hours**
- √ **Great training**
- √ **Interesting work**
- √ **Great managers and friendly co-workers**
- √ **Personal acknowledgement**
- √ **Corporate values and company actions support altruism and make a positive difference in the world**
- √ **Tuition reimbursement**
- √ **Paid time off to do volunteer work**
- √ _____
- √ _____
- √ _____
- √ _____

The bottom line is this:

Become a place where this generation wants to work and they'll want to work for you.

Do you communicate openly? Are you willing to explain why you are asking employees to do things? Are your managers “new worker friendly?” Do they know how to orient newcomers to your marketplace and the working world? In addition to the list above, are you willing to offer such Gen Y perks as time off on Friday nights during football season and limos to take them to their proms?

Are you offering an interesting challenge and a great opportunity or just another job?

And, if you’re only offering the latter, why? If all you have to offer is a \$7.00 per hour job, all you’ll get are people looking for an hourly job that pays \$7.00 per hour.

Locate the Best Gen Y Hiring Pools

The single best way to gain access to the best Gen Y hiring pools is by becoming an employer-of-choice with the people who influence them: their parents, teachers, coaches, church and school leaders and friends.

Employers who get involved with schools get first shot at the best students. Find a high school and adopt it. Many organizations, including fast food restaurants, retailers, grocery stores and all major discounters support students who make good grades by providing coupons for free or discounted food, uniforms, or services.

Support Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) programs—they’re a great source of good employees. Introduce yourself to the school’s DE counselor; ask what your company can do to help, and then do it. When the guidance counselor has a great student who wants to go to work, you’ll be the first to know.

Support school athletic programs. Adopt a team and provide uniforms and equipment.

Attend the games and meet the team members and their parents. Let everyone know you’re always on the lookout for a few great employees.

Offer similar support to youth programs and camps run by religious institutions.

Spend most of your print ad budget in alternative newspapers like arts and entertainment weeklies (widely read by most Gen Y's). Advertise in high school and college newspapers, not in traditional newspapers – almost no one under the age of 30 reads them.

Spend the rest of your print ad budget on hiring flyers and put one in every package that leaves your store. Radio is an excellent ad medium for this generation. Post jobs on the Internet, at the mall, movie theaters, and wherever else Gen Y is likely to visit.

Four Additional Sources of Great Employees

1. All the good people who used to work for you

Don't be your competitor's training ground. Bring the good ones back next season. If they leave you during football or volleyball season, bring them back after. If they gave you great seasonal help last year, get them back this year. When your employees go to work somewhere else, they often discover that the grass isn't greener on the other side after all. Research shows that 20-25% of all supervisors or managers employed today presently work for a company they once left. Just think, if 20% of all the good employees who used to work for you came back, you'd have great "new" employees who need little or no training.

To get them back you may only have to ask. Be sure you let people leave with dignity. A month or so after someone good has left, call and ask if he or she is willing to come back. The worst that can happen is that they'll say "No." And even if they do, they can be a valuable source of information about why they left and of referrals.

Simply ask, “Do you know anyone else you can recommend who might fit our company?”

One key measure of a “magnetic company” — one that recruits, hires and retains the best — is that 50% of its hires come from employee referrals.

And don’t overlook all the good people you yourself have worked with in other places over the years. They’re probably just as good now as they were then.

2. All the good employees who work for you now

Research shows that employee-referred candidates are three times more likely to be a good match for the job. This is because your associates give these candidates detailed information about the job requirements and working conditions. Also, because referred new hires already have a friend at work, they know what to expect going in and are less likely to be fired or quit within the first three months.

Let your present staff know that you need good people. Create an employee referral program that rewards current employees for referring prospects who get hired. Don’t make the mistake of waiting three months or longer to reward employees who refer a new hire. Reward the behavior you want when you get it by rewarding employees when you hire the people they refer, not after “x” number of days.

Give a cash bonus, paid time-off, first choice of work shifts, or other perks for a successful referral, and give it to the referring employee in the presence of your other employees. Make your employee-referral program fun—create some excitement around it by running a contest to see which employee can provide the most referrals.

3. People who are currently applying to work for you

Professional recruiters report that the people they interview refer some of their best applicants. Ask every applicant who has worked before for the names of three of their present or former co-workers. Ask everyone for three personal references.

When you call these people, you'll get as much information about their abilities as you do about the applicant's.

If you like what you hear, add their names to your recruiting file. Then, when you need someone like them in the future you can call again, remind them of your previous conversation and mention you have a job opening that might interest them.

The bonus in this is that because no one told these people not to talk to you, you'll probably get more substantial, useful information about the applicant's qualities than you will from supervisory references who've been instructed to only give you their former employee's "name, rank and serial number."

4. All your customers

Don't overlook opportunities to recruit your customers and the people they influence.

Take a tip from Southwest Airlines, which targets its passengers through direct mail and posts signs in airports that ask, "Are you sick of where you work?" Signs in Starbucks Coffee read, "If you like the Starbucks experience, maybe you'd like to work here."

Find A Niche And Establish Yourself

Find a niche that works for your company and establish yourself. If you're the right kind of employer, once you get into that niche, the kind of employees you want will come to you.

For example, one of my clients seeks employees who understand rules and can stick to their guns. His company targets young people who have refereed sports matches.

Another employer who believes that home-schooled kids are more disciplined and adaptable gets associations for home schooling to send emails advertising job openings.

Whatever niche you choose, be sure to introduce yourself to guidance counselors at local high schools and colleges and make them aware of your hiring needs and what your company can offer their students.

Design Recruiting Messages That Appeal

Start creating good recruiting messages by writing a list of reasons that people would want to work for your company. If you don't have such a list, the people you want to hire won't have one either. Summarize the points in your list as recruiting slogans that will catch the eyes and minds of high-quality applicants. Create messages that appeal to young employees by having your young employees and first-time workers write them.

Make it fun — run a contest with prizes for the best slogans.

What messages do you want to send? Do people want to work for you because you have great managers? Then maybe your advertising slogan should be: "If you want to work for a great manager, come to work for us." If your message is that you have truly flexible hours, try "We make our schedule fit your schedule."

Put signs in your workplace and on buttons employees wear with slogans like: “Our Growth is Your Opportunity”, “Come Join Our Winning Team”, “Some Call It Work— We Call It Fun” or “Come for the Job, Stay for the Career.”

As you might expect, a message like: “Maturity and Experience Appreciated” will net older applicants looking for a second career rather than first-time workers. Using the same messages repeatedly draws the same kinds of people. If you want more employee diversity or an expanded pool, change your message!

Keep Your Hiring Message Consistent

Keep your hiring message consistent by making sure that all of your job postings contain the same basic information about your company, including its history, mission statement, logo and tag line and links to your company’s website.

Internet and print ads should have the same look and feel so potential employees recognize your message wherever they encounter it. Create a template that recruiters from any department in your company can easily use.

All recruiting ads should contain the following:

Who: Your company name and a description of your ideal candidate, job hotline number and website address

What: A strong job title and a one-sentence description of the job’s duties and responsibilities

When: Time frame in which applicants should respond and the deadline for responses

Why: The reason the job is available (expansion, growth or internal promotion)

Where: Address or general location of the job

How: Exact procedures for applying (phone, FAX, Internet, email, or in person)

How Much: “Competitive wages and benefits” is usually sufficient. Ads that read, “\$6.50 per hour” will get you people who want to work for \$6.50 per hour. Try using something like “Earn \$12,500 before you go to college.”

Be sure that all ads express your company’s culture. A loud, flashy banner ad may get attention, but if your company is conservative it will tend to draw applicants who are a poor cultural fit.

When online applications are completed, the final mouse click for the applications should take applicants back to the company’s home page.

Target Gen Y’s by Offering Work Incentives

Target the hiring pools you want by offering work incentives of interest to them. For example, a barbeque restaurant in Dallas targets good students by paying 50¢ an hour more for every hour worked for every A the student receives in a semester. The message is, “We pay you to succeed in school.” A student who works 200 hours during a semester and receives three A’s also receives another \$350.00. Should an employee’s grades fall below a B, that employee goes on probation. D’s cost employees their jobs. Not surprisingly, parents want their kids to work there.

If you want to hire Spanish-speaking employees for whom English is a second language, offer free ESL classes that help them fit more effectively into the workforce. Help bright applicants who weren’t able to finish high school get their GEDs. If your job requires a high level of physical fitness, target athletic team members who need to stay in shape.

A Few Choice Words about the Internet

Online recruiting is arguably the biggest boon in hiring history. It’s the most cost-effective way for employers to reach literally millions of prospective workers. However,

online recruiting is raising the level of competition between companies for good employees because computer-savvy job seekers can quickly and conveniently apply for dozens of jobs with a few keystrokes and mouse clicks. This, coupled with the huge number of jobs posted on the Internet, gives job seekers a significant advantage in the labor market. Employers seeking the top candidates (and why would you seek anyone else?) must respond immediately to Internet applications or risk having a competitor reach the applicant first. Many job boards offer services that help you contact applicants swiftly.

NOTE: If you would like a list of suppliers of web-based job boards, 24-hour job hotlines, automated hiring and applicant-tracking systems, hiring systems, or training for managers, e-mail mkleiman@melkleiman.com.

IV. Hiring Tools and Processes

Putting Hiring Tools and Processes in Place

Make your company applicant-friendly. Go out of your way to make a great first impression on potential employees. Remember, these are the children of your present customers and the customers of your future. Treat everyone who applies as you would want employers to treat a member of your family. Every applicant should know that you want to hire the very best person available. Don't disappoint them.

Use Only First-Rate Hiring Systems

If your ad says, "We only hire the best," don't have a second-rate hiring system. Use the best hiring system and it will ensure you hire the best employees rather than the best applicants.

If your company is large enough, has a high turnover, does seasonal hiring or has a number of hiring locations, consider installing an automated hiring system with a 24/7

job hotline, website applications and hiring kiosk stations in your locations connected to a centralized management center.

This type of system offers a centralized data center, consistency of practice, reduces your legal exposure, saves management time and presents an impressive, professional company image. It also increases applicant flow and helps attract the more passive type of job candidate, not only those looking for a job, but those looking for a better job.

Every good hiring system demands a clear employment application form, not a smudged or poor copy. Make sure that the form you use is neat, clean, clear, easy to use and 100% legal. You only have one chance to make a first impression, so make it a good one!

The more you know about potential employees, the less you risk. Your goal as an employer is getting every piece of legally obtainable information about every applicant — legally. Every form you use during the hiring process (and afterward, for that matter) must comply with both federal and state employment laws. Using a generic application, reference-checking or other employment form could land you in big trouble because it may not be aligned with the employment laws specific to your state. In order to get all of the legally obtainable information you need, have your hiring forms initially and periodically reviewed by an attorney knowledgeable with your state's employment laws.

Make Getting an Interview Easy

Don't interview only at set times and places. First-rate systems have a 24-hour job hotline that allows jobseekers to apply over the phone and via the Internet. Making it easy for people to apply when they want to apply increases both your pool of applicants and the likelihood that you will hire the kinds of employees you want.

Don't run a newspaper ad on Sunday that asks potential candidates to apply on the following Wednesday. In fact, don't restrict on-site applications other than by your hours of operation, and be sure that your ads specify 24/7 phone and Internet applications are available.

Don't restrict on-site applicants to set days and times. Make certain that there's always someone on the job who is trained to handout and accept applications in a professional manner. Don't let applicants take forms home; 80% of them won't come back. Have applicants fill out forms on site so they invest time in the process.

Make Getting a Job Hard

If you don't value the job, neither will the people who apply for it. Making your jobs hard to get makes the best people want them even more. Sell your company, not the job.

A thorough and professional employee-selection process tells applicants that you take hiring seriously and don't hire just anyone. People who want just any job will recognize that their chances are slim to none and naturally deselect themselves.

The U.S. Department of Labor reports that 50% of all new hourly employees quit or are fired within their first six months on the job. Studies put employee turnover costs at \$1500 for employees who last one month or less on the job and the costs go up from there.

Insisting on completed application and reference-checking forms and written permission to perform a criminal record check shows applicants you taking hiring only the best people seriously.

View Every Part of the Hiring Process as a Test

Recognize that everything you do in the hiring process constitutes a test and that each test should become progressively more difficult. In addition to providing you with all the basic information you need, telling applicants that they must fill out the application blank completely tests how well the applicant follows directions. If anything is left blank, the applicant just failed the first test.

Setting up specific interview times is a test. If the job calls for being at work by 5AM, scheduling the initial interview for that time tests the applicant's ability to arrive early in the morning and on time. (Refuse to interview applicants who don't arrive on time.)

Does your company have a dress code? Let applicants know what appropriate dress means to you before they come in for their interviews. Applicants who arrive inappropriately dressed don't pass the test.

If the job calls for lifting items that weigh 50 pounds, have applicants show you they can do it. If the job requires good counter skills, place the applicant at the counter as a customer and rate the quality of the service they receive. Follow the same procedure with checkers, cashiers and anyone else who interacts with customers.

If the employee will have to spend 30 minutes per shift organizing food in a walk-in cooler with a temperature of less than 30 degrees, see how applicants respond to this environment before you hire them.

The point is, don't just tell applicants what they will need to do on the job, test for whatever the skills, attitudes, personality and abilities the job requires.

It's sad, but true: We hire people for what we think they know—and fire them for who they are. Remember that what you see from an applicant in an interview is probably better than anything you'll ever see again.

Test for attitude, values and character by asking how the applicant would handle ethical or moral problems such as those posed by numbers 14 and 15 on the list of interview questions below.

Drug-test, making certain to first obtain written consent from applicants and from parents of applicants who are under legal age.

Use a structured interview question set that compares apples to apples, not apples to oranges. Know the questions you need to ask and the answers you want to hear.

Train Every Manager

Train every manager how to be a skilled interviewer. Every manager should know how to conduct an effective interview, should interview in precisely the same way, and should understand why this is important. Uniformly conducted interviews provide you with the most accurate comparisons and protect your company from hiring lawsuits as well.

NOTE: For more information on in-depth interview training for managers, call me at (800) 218-0930, ext. 119 or e-mail mkleiman@melkleiman.com.

Set the Tone, Use Structured Question Sets

Prepare for the interview by getting the basic data-gathering out of the way early on, preferably as part of a preliminary telephone or web-based screening, before you provide the applicant with an application blank.

Only comfortable applicants will give you all the information you need to make a good hiring decision. Never interview from across a desk. Such interviews usually seem like inquisitions to applicants, make them feel ill at ease, and may adversely affect the quality of information you receive. Ideally, you and the applicant should sit next to or facing each other.

Minimize distractions — no phone calls or interruptions. Offer the applicant coffee or a soft drink. Spend the first few minutes in neutral give-and-take small talk about traffic or the weather to improve the quality of the entire interview. Set the tone for the interview by allowing the first-time applicant enough time to relax. This may take longer for someone who hasn't done a lot of interviewing, but if your applicant isn't relaxed it will be very difficult to get an accurate picture of the real person. Once the applicant has relaxed, it's time to begin.

Tell applicants that during the interview you will ask questions designed to gather specific information and that you will tell them about the job and company and answer any questions they may have as well.

Once again, a structured interview that uses the exact same questions allows you to compare apples to apples rather than to oranges, identify the best candidates for your positions, and stay out of legal trouble.

Begin this entire process with automatic “kick out” questions that happen as early as possible. Have applicants answer these when they turn in their applications to save time and money because their answers will determine whether you want to spend time in a one-on-one interview.

“Kick out” questions include:

1. Do you have a reliable way to get to work? What is it?
2. What is your minimum salary requirement?
3. What hours and days are you available to work?
4. What hours and days are you not available to work?
5. Are you willing to take a drug test?

6. We do perform criminal checks on all applicants. Is there anything you want to tell me about?
7. What do you think it takes to be a good employee? (More specifically, a good server, hostess, cashier?)

For those who pass muster, questions like those that follow encourage applicants to reveal more of themselves:

1. What made you think you would like to work for our company? (Use the answers in your market research.)
2. What have you done in the past to earn money? What three things did you learn by doing this?
3. How do you presently get your spending money?
4. What do you think would be a fair attendance policy? How many times do you think you should be excused from working when you are scheduled to work? How many times should you be allowed to be late? What do you consider a good reason for missing work or being late for work?
5. If we hire you, how long do you plan to work here?
6. If applicants are presently working, ask them to tell you about the jobs they are now doing. Get them to tell you in detail about their specific duties and responsibilities.
7. What was the toughest job you ever had at home, school or at work? What made it tough? How long did you work at it? What did you learn from it?
8. Tell me about the best teacher you have had. Why was he or she your best teacher?

9. Have you ever been on a team? What role did you play? What did you learn?
10. What four positive words would your friends use to describe you? What words would your parents, teachers and coach use? What three negative words would they use to describe you? Why do you think they would choose those words? Do you agree or disagree with their choices?
11. How often are you late for school or other activities? What is your definition of “on time?”
12. What would you do if you were scheduled to work, but found unexpectedly that you needed to do something for school that you couldn’t get done if you went to work?
13. What will your parents, teachers, coach and friends tell me about you when I call them to check your references?
14. What would you do if you knew that one of your friends was stealing from work?
15. What would you do if one of your friends asked you to use your employee discount for his or her benefit?
16. What’s the worst trouble you have ever been in? Was that really the worst trouble you have ever been in?
17. Why should I hire you over any other applicant?
18. What’s the one reason I shouldn’t hire you?
19. If you could only ask me one question about the job or the company, what would you ask?
20. Why did you choose that question? What other questions do you have?

21. What else would you like to tell me about yourself that you have not already told me?

Questions NOT to Ask

1. Any question that is not directly related to job performance is unacceptable to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, including questions about race, religion, or sexual preference.
2. Questions that lead applicants to the proper answer, such as “Am I correct that you’re looking for a job with growth potential?” or “Do you think you’d like working for us?”
3. Commonly asked questions to which the answers are self-evident, such as “Would you object to working long hours?”
4. Whatever might bias the applicant’s response because you’ve revealed your own feelings, as in: “How could you stand working for that kind of supervisor?”
5. Questions that can be answered with a simple “yes” or “no”, unless the questions are about legal age and the right to work.
6. Questions that have nothing to do with the job or have already been answered on the application form.

Let the Applicant Do Most of the Talking

Structure your interviews so that the applicant does most of the talking. When you ask a question, wait patiently for the answer. Prompting applicants who are slow to answer questions is one of the most common mistakes interviewers make.

Limit your own speech to 20-25% of the total time. Use that time to give applicants a clear picture of your company and the job by telling them about:

- Working hours
- Working conditions and hazards
- Realistic picture of career path
- Company policy on promotion and pay increases, attendance, probation period, medical exams and dress code
- Benefits provided
- Anticipated job changes

Challenges Gen Y Employers Face

Regardless of how attractive you think your company is, the job you need filled may not be one that these first-timers are willing to perform. Many Gen Y's may not perceive your jobs as having any challenge, potential for growth, or long-term value. It's up to you to let them know what they can learn from working for you and how it will benefit them later in life.

It's important that you teach them the link between their jobs and other jobs and how what they do will affect the company's success.

Don't Become a High-Cost Hiring Statistic

According to recent research, fully one-third of today's employees are dissatisfied with their present jobs and plan to leave as soon as better opportunities become available.

Hiring and training are expensive. The best way to reduce your hiring costs is to become a business where employees want to stay by setting and living strong, positive core values.

For example, Chick-fil-a, which has one of the lowest fast food industry turnover rates in the country, holds the philosophy that "We grow our people." In effect, they say to

employees, “We may be a place that sells chicken sandwiches, but we value our people and we’re going to teach you how to run a chicken stand correctly.”

Give potential employees the message that what they could learn during their time with you may make them more valuable in the marketplace three years from now.

Train all employees to do every job. Don’t just hire people to work the cash register, hire them to work the cash register, deli, bakery, and whatever. You’ll like this because your employees will be better trained and more flexible. Your employees will like it because they’ll be learning more and expanding skills.

Rules: Tell Them Why You Hire Them and Tell Them Why You’d Fire Them

Everyone needs rules. Even when we don’t like the rules, we’d be miserable without them because we wouldn’t know what is expected of us and that makes us feel uneasy and even frightened.

Explain your rules clearly. When an applicant accepts your job offer, have them sign a commitment card similar to the sample below that defines your expectations of their performance.

My Commitment to My Employer and Myself

I will treat every guest and team member as I wish to be treated, with the utmost respect and courtesy.

I will promote goodwill to all guests and team members, and handle guests' concerns with the attitude that "the guest is always right."

I will practice productive job behavior, arrive at work on time and follow all rules even when unsupervised.

I will do what needs to be done to the best of my ability.

I will uphold the standards and ethics the company has set, including those regarding respect for property and those that prohibit illegal substances.

I will follow and promote all safety rules and regulations.

I will uphold the company image in my personal grooming, dress, language and behavior.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Your Responsibility as a First Boss

When you hire first-time workers you are responsible for setting the work standards they will hold to for the rest of their working life. You have a responsibility to hold them accountable, be sure they do what's expected, but that work can still be fun too. Don't take this responsibility lightly. Recognize that it's also an opportunity to make a positive contribution to society by helping employees develop their work skills and habits to the fullest. Consider it an honor to be where you are.

Never Overlook Good Alternatives

Finally, never overlook good hiring alternatives. Great first-time employees aren't limited to Gen Y. Recent immigrants could be excellent first-time workers. So could people who've been out of the workforce for 30 years, or people who retired and now want to work again. People with disabilities and military veterans make excellent employees and have demonstrated great work ethics.

Great First-time Workers Come from Everywhere

Leads for great first-time workers can come from anywhere. The odds are that most of the good employees you encounter, whether or not they are members of Gen Y themselves, will know of someone equally as good who is looking for a first job.

Put recruiting messages on your business cards. Give these cards to anyone who provides you with exceptionally good service whenever you're out and about, and give some to your employees to pass out too. You may also want to provide your employees with business cards. It's a great, inexpensive way to make them feel important.

Tell your employees to print their own names on the bottom of the reverse side. Ask applicants to enter the name of your employee who referred them in the "referred by" section of your application.

Hire for what's on the inside. A great attitude is the most important quality in any employee — and great attitudes are infectious. So, hire for attitude and train for skills.

Sample Recruiting Card

I Appreciate Your Great Service

We're looking for people just like you to be part of our team.

If you or someone you know might want to explore employment opportunities
with us, please call me for a confidential interview.

(your name and the company's name, phone and address)

And keep up the good work!

For more hiring help, go to www.melkleiman.com and sign up for Mel's free, biweekly Hot Hiring Hints email and join our community of business owners, corporate executives, and hiring managers responsible for attracting, selecting and retaining hourly employees.