

Practical Hiring to Avoid Firing

How do you make your hiring and firing decisions? Where do you find your best employees?

Kim Wilkie, manager
The Dog & Pony Shop
Ladner, British Columbia

Employees find us; we never look for them. They're usually fellow riders, competitors or barn mates. For instance, I met a current employee at my horse's barn. After boarding my horse there a year, I told her she'd make a great Dog & Pony Shop employee. I liked how she handled horses and her upbeat attitude and maturity. Whether they work in or out of the shop, employees represent the store, so we hire people who are already involved in the horse industry — people we know.

If we hire carefully, we tend not to have to fire. If there's a firing situation, however, we talk about it at length. We're always very fair; in fact, I'd say we're more than fair. Employees are given many chances before anyone is fired.

There's always a flexible trial period in case a problem arises during the first few weeks and we decide — or the new employee decides — that the arrangement won't work. We almost always know ahead of time if an employee is going to work out well.

Factors that affect employee turnover are someone going away to college or pursuing another career after graduation.

Would you like to see a particular topic or question featured in an upcoming *Retailer Spotlight*? Send your request to eqcredit@westernhorseman.com; Fax: 719-633-1392.

Katherine "Kate" Grosser, co-owner/manager
Pleasant Hills Saddle Shop
Rogers, Minn.

We carry western and English tack, clothing and supplies. We have 20 sales employees, but most of them are part-time workers.

You never know when the "right" person will walk into the store, so we always have a "Help Wanted" sign out front. We find positions for new employees if they're really good. We also run "Help Wanted" ads in our local newspaper if we're low on applicants.

We work in a specialty field, and our shop isn't a department store that can hire just anybody. If applicants have sales experience, and they know the horse industry, that counts for a lot in our hiring decision.

Our hiring decisions are based on applicants' experience. We like to hire people who are familiar with the horse industry, but horse knowledge isn't mandatory. Qualified sales applicants can be paired with knowledgeable employees who are also horse people and still do a good job.

We have a family business with three of us making the hiring and firing decisions. We review the applications, and then one of us gives the personal interview.

I've had part-time employees who've worked for us 10 to 15 years. When they're first hired, we teach them about our products and accustom them to working the floor. Then we start them on the cash register and other duties. In 35 years of business, I think we've fired only one person.

Susan Davis, owner
Davis Trailerworld
York, N.Y.

We've been in business since 1988 and have 10 full-time employees. Our employees find us by word of mouth. Many times we know a qualified person who's looking for a job, but we avoid hiring close friends, as it's very hard to discipline a friend.

Through the years, I can remember firing only one employee; most of them leave to start new jobs. We have a good rapport with each of our employees, and we consider our staff as family.

Trailer sales are our main source of income, so we're particular about our workmanship quality. When a trailer sells, we prep it and make sure it's ready to go. If a customer has a wrecked trailer, we can fix it, but we mostly repair damage from daily wear and tear, such as malfunctioning brakes and lights. We also fabricate trailer interiors to our customers' specifications.

Two of my sons work with me, one in the shop and another selling trailers. Some of our employees come to us with experience, but we prefer to do on-the-job training, so they learn to do a job our way. We hire mostly for mechanical ability, but one employee does ride. ■

Compiled by Bonnie Jeter, a free-lance writer and amateur dressage rider from Austin, Texas. In addition to a bachelor's degree in equine science, Bonnie has more than 16 years' experience writing in the equine, health-care and business industries.