

# Retail Staffing 101: How to Hire, Train, and Retain The Right Employees

By Humayun Khan



With the summer just around the corner, you're probably already thinking about getting some extra help for your retail small business.

As temperatures rise, retailers often see a natural increase in foot traffic as shoppers spend time outdoors perusing products from various stores.

However, as if it already wasn't hard enough to find the right people to work for you, with more job options available to them, it's only going to get tougher.

Which is why in this post, I'll be covering tips on how to hire, train, and retain employees so you don't continue to face increased recruiting and turnover costs and get the help you need to make the most of the holiday season and beyond.



Let's dive in.

## Finding and Hiring Great Talent

When it comes to finding and hiring great talent for your retail store, chances are you'll soon realize that competing with the big-box retailers is no easy task, especially during the holiday season.

To deal with the frustration of not being able to solicit enough candidates with your existing tactics, you'd do well to heed the words of customer service expert [Anne. M. Obarski](#), who suggests the following as a starting point:

*"Great employees are not born, they are developed in a business atmosphere where training is stressed, individuality is encouraged and personalities are respected. Word travels about the work environment in all sizes of stores. The key to recruiting quality employees is promoting and possessing a positive work environment no matter how large or small you are."*

With those words in mind, a good first step is developing a criteria for who you're looking for. This should ideally be in the form of a concrete job title and job description. Check out this [Retail Associate job posting by Taylor Stitch](#) to get started. As you'll notice, there's a few things you'll have to be very clear on, including:

- Daily duties and responsibilities
- Personality Traits
- Physical Requirements
- Qualifications or Experience Level

Once you know what type of employee you're looking for, it's time to get the word out. Traditionally, this meant simply putting a "Hiring" sign in the window display, but what you might find is that's often not good enough to get the quality or quantity of applicants that meet your needs. Given that you might not



have the budget to post to popular job boards and the like, here are some cost effective ways to advertising your job opening:

- Posting to your company and personal social media accounts, which should include Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram
- Asking family, friends, and professional networks for referrals
- Going to other retail stores and casually mentioning the opportunity to a sales rep that delights you, a practice that's also known as "poaching" in the recruiting industry
- Posting to Craigslist

Once you start getting flooded with resumes and prospective candidates, there's still interviewing selected individuals, and choosing which ones will make the cut. To help you do just that, here are tips from [retail expert Bob Phibbs](#):

- **Hire people to work more hours, more shifts:** Don't hire tons of part-time workers, instead hire fewer workers who can work more hours.
- **Look for employees who play well with others:** During the interview, seek out evidence that applicant is engaged in the "real world" with other human beings (i.e. sports, volunteering, hobby groups...etc.) We look for the same thing with [Shopify jobs](#).
- **Past behavior determines future behavior:** Frame interview questions around specific situations, meaning asking questions like "give me a time...", "when was the last time...", and other [behavioural type interview questions](#).
- **Sell them on why you're a great place to work:** Phibbs recommends talking about your history, the work environment, perks, management style...etc.
- **Don't trust your gut:** Remember that no one is perfect, so even if you've found somebody who answers questions to your exact liking, be your own devil's advocate and find something that you don't like about them to balance your perspective.



- **Hire after a cooling off period:** give yourself some time before making the final call.

Once you've gone through the process and found the perfect number of employees you require, it's time to move onto training and retaining them.

## Training for Stellar Performance



Before you get started on training your newly hired employees, it's important that you understand and differentiate between the ideas of teaching the necessary "hard skills" and conditioning the behaviour or "soft-skills" of your employees.

You've probably already experienced that specific skills expected from your new hires like using your POS, writing reports, stocking and managing inventory require step-by-step instructions. Here it's not a good thing when an employee gets creative and deviates from what's expected from them.

But then, other aspects of the job like courtesy, safety, efficiency, customer service and the like shouldn't be taught in the same robotic "how-to" way. You'll obviously want to provide guidelines and share with them what you've found to work in the past, but then leave some space for them to insert their own personality and thereby allow them to make an emotional investment in the job.

Two companies that do an incredible job of training and empowering their employees happen to be Disney and Nordstrom, who create possibly some of the **most proactive and courteous employees** in the world.

Disney provide general guidelines around safety, cost control, and efficiency but then simply tells new hires that the desired outcome of every interaction is to delight the "guest" and where possible exceed their expectation, leaving it up to their employees to fill in the gap. Meanwhile, Nordstrom is known for providing what might be the most succinct employee handbook ever, containing one simple rule, "use good judgement in all situations."

Here are some other tips for rethinking how you train your employees:

- **Listen More Than You Talk:** Doing the inverse will portray you as some one who "knows-it-all" and someone who isn't open to suggestions , ideas, and new ways of doing things.
- **Understand Their Motivation:** People are encouraged to do better at their job for all sorts of reasons, some extrinsic (salary, commission, perks) some intrinsic (skill mastery, autonomy, and learning new things), so it's fair to say that if you treat everyone the same, you'll get less than ideal results.
- **Help Them Learn:** People make mistakes, you've made them, I've made them, and your employees will make them. Rather than "losing it" or blaming them, consider helping them reflect on their actions, what



went wrong, and what could be done differently the next time around for improved results.

Lastly, if you're really keen on learning more about employee behaviour, I highly recommend checking out Dan Pink's book "[Drive](#)."

## It's All About Retention

After putting in so much time and effort to find, interview, hire, and then train a new employee, it's devastating when they prematurely leave, thereby requiring you to go through the hiring cycle all over again.

Just how costly is to replace an employee? Small Business Chronicle estimates that [on average it costs \\$17,000](#) to replace an employee that is at the medium wage in the U.S., which was [almost \\$52,000 in 2013](#), so you can scale back from there. The bottom line is that it's costly not matter how much you pay your employees.

Additionally, here are some interesting stats from [a survey by Hay Group](#):

- 26% of retailers said their employee turnover costs have increased since last year
- 74% of retailers said their workers leave for better opportunities, rather than higher salaries
- Retailers averaged 67% turnover for part-time employees

So, how can you increase retention for your retail employees? Here are some quick tips to get you to start thinking in the right direction:

- **Create a Roadmap of Advancement:** As the above statistics showcase, employees leave for better opportunities, not necessarily better pay. Which is why you should carefully consider outlining an



advancement plan to help employees see where they could be in a given period of time.

- **Provide Regular Feedback:** Performance reviews don't need to come a handful of times a year or for the sole purposes of discussing a raise. It's important to have a regular check-in to provide feedback and obtain your employee's opinions and concerns consistently.
- **Create Trust and Transparency:** Making your self available to connect with your employees through an "open-door" policy or carrying an approachable demeanour will go a long way towards winning your employees over and getting them to stick around.

On top of those suggestions, brainstorm some workplace characteristics that you would want to work in? Are they all present in what you have to offer? Where can you fill in the gaps?

## Learning From Mistakes

Getting your store properly staffed for the holiday season or in general is never an easy task, but hopefully with these tips you have a better understanding of what you could do differently to improve results.

The quest to finding great employees is both an art and science, something requiring both good intuition and strong judgement, but most importantly practice. So if you've made some mistakes in the past in the department, learn your lessons and move on. With that, get out there and hire some stellar employees.

**P.S.** If you liked this post, you'll love [How Nordstrom Made Its Brand Synonymous With Customer Service](#) and [The Top 10 Online Resources That Will Help You Become A Local SEO Expert](#). And make sure you follow [Shopify's retail blog](#) for tips and advice on building a thriving retail business.

