

# Finding Better Employees in a Tough Economy

by Les Cunningham

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In business, the only person (usually) not at risk to be “let go” is the owner. I’ve found that the majority of owners are willing to admit their shortcomings, but a lot of them are unaware as to what they can do about them, especially when it comes to their employees.

Most of the time, it is not a surprise to an owner that they have some employees who are not performing up to expectations. Additionally, the longer an employee has been with the company, the more emotional ties there are in the situation. However, it’s not an even deal: owners seem to have a sense of loyalty to their employees disproportionate to that which employees have to their employer.

Most business owners have a pretty clear idea of what the tasks their employees should be performing, and are dismayed when these expectations are not being met. In many cases the problem is that, while having verbally communicated what is expected and how it is to be achieved, the owner never got around to writing it down. In such situations, no matter how “in sync” an employer and employee may say they are, there will exist a feeling that the two are not on the same page because, literally, there is no page!

In trying to convey the information, neither the Vulcan Mind Meld nor telepathy works 100 percent of the time (at least not for me). The only successful recourse I’ve found is to write down what is expected. This is sometimes referred to as – wait for it – a Job Description.

Many employees are convinced that the owner does not put expectations down on paper because they want to be able to change their expectations from one conversation to the next. On the other side, employers seem to feel that if they write down what they want someone to do, that person will only meet the written expectations and do nothing else.

Obviously, maintaining these combative positions will get the company nowhere.

As an owner, write down – don't just consider it, do it – a job description for every single position you have in the company. Assume nothing; no detail is too small. Once you've finished, sit down with each employee, present them with the written description and ask them what their thoughts are regarding the description and what they think needs to be added or deleted. The final sentence should be something along the lines of "...and any others tasks that management needs done."



*Employees that work well together help things run smoothly*

Have the manager and the employee sign off on the description, and use it as a guide for the employee to get their work done, and as a benchmark as to whether or not they are doing what is expected of them. Then, every year during the employee's review, go back through the job description together, determine what items no longer need doing and delete them. At the same time, add any new items that are now part of that position's responsibilities.

The job description is really meant to be used as a communication tool between management and the employee, to better lay out what is expected to be done and by whom.

Now that that's done, you need to determine if your existing employees match up to what their job require. Do they get their job done correctly? On time? On budget? If the answer is not what it needs to be, try this three-pronged approach:

1. Train your employees so they have the tools and skills to perform their job.
2. Give them incentives to produce the results you require.
3. Step back and give them the opportunity to do what you've trained them to do

After a mutually negotiated time has passed, revisit the situation and determine if the employee is performing to necessary standards. If they do not do or are not able to do their job, thank them for their service, write them a letter of recommendation and send them out to meet their future.

Now you have a position to fill, and you should select the best replacement available. Generally speaking, most



people are able to find a better and more qualified individual to replace someone they've had to let go.

*It's important  
your employees  
understand and  
follow proper  
protocols*

Update the written job description with any tweaks that you think are needed. Use that description in verbal, electronic and print media to let people know what you are looking for in a new employee. You might put a note at the bottom of the description, saying something along the lines of "only apply if you meet or exceed these requirements."

Assign one person to check the qualifications of all candidates and prepare an interview list of the top candidates that meet and or exceed the job requirements. Conduct interviews of the candidates with both the individual's planned supervisor and with the individuals that the new individual will be working with.

After you identify your top candidates, consider giving them a DISC Test, a type of test designed to examine the behavior of individuals in certain environments or situations. Get help from a consultant trained in giving these tests.

Once you have digested all of your information, hire the individual that best suits your job needs.

Is this process I've described perfect? Absolutely not, but it is a mix of the best practices that I've seen being used and working around North America, it has gotten results for those that follow them. If this sounds a bit harsh, keep in mind that operating a successful business requires daily efforts by all company members so as to allow the company and its employees to achieve their goals.

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