

## Expert Perspective: Retail is...

# Personnel

**W**hen you look throughout your store, one asset is clearly more important than all the others: your employees. Without them, it doesn't matter how great the building looks, how well the store is merchandised or how much you have invested in technology. Your employees are the lifeblood of your organization, and without them, you're doomed. The difference between a good or great busy Saturday can all come down to the workers you have in the store.

Usually, finding people is not a problem. Now, finding good people? Well, that's another story. If you happen to find some great employees, retaining them is something that can keep even the best retailers awake at night.

If your people truly are your most important asset, how do you not only find the right ones, but make sure they stay for the long term, remain engaged and help move the organization forward? Whether you operate a hardware store, home center, lumberyard or similar type of company, and no matter if you like to hire high school students, retirees or former contractors looking for a change, there are three big ideas related to employee recruitment and retention you should embrace and could benefit from.

### Stop Hiring, Start Recruiting

If you have ever posted a help-wanted ad in a newspaper, you know what to expect—lots of poorly written and incomplete applications. My most recent favorite? On an application, where a potential employee was asked to answer the question “Why would you make a great employee?”, in all sincerity, the candidate wrote, “I know employees don't give 100 percent at work. But, when I'm here, I'll give you 40 percent, and you get all 40 percent.” If that makes you laugh and cry at the same time, you can see the issue with placing a help-wanted ad when you're looking for quality employees.

Instead of approaching the process as simply hiring, consider finding potential candidates by recruiting. In order to do this, you need to have a list of qualities you want in your employees. You need to know what is important to your store and find people who care about the same things. You can train your staff on product knowledge and proper processes, but you can't teach work ethic and personality.

When you see the qualities that make a great employee who's a good fit for what your store needs, take action. If it's the waitress at breakfast, leave her your card and tell her you're always looking for great people like her to join your team.



“Recruit great people, get them to buy into a purpose bigger than themselves and empower them to make decisions.”

Don't assume that just because someone appears to be happily employed, that they aren't willing to have a conversation about a new career opportunity. Leaving your business card may not create an instant conversation with a potential candidate, but it may be something they will hold on to. They will remember being recognized for doing good work. And if that individual decides to leave their current job, you will be top of mind when they are ready.

#### Give Them a Purpose

People will only work "for the money" for so long. Your employees want to know their

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work matters. In order for this to happen, you have to help your staff members understand they are more than cashiers or the people who work in the plumbing department. They need to know what their purpose is while they are at work, and you can help them define it.

Does your store have a mission statement? If not, it may be time to define one. "We exist to sell more stuff than we did last year" is not a mission statement. Your mission statement should put words to the purpose of your business. This statement should clarify why you do what you do.

"We exist to provide a world-class customer experience and help our neighbors solve their home improvement problems."

That's a statement full of purpose. Once you know your purpose, clearly and passionately communicate it to your employees so they can embrace it.

When people have purpose, they act passionately. They take things personally. While they may not have ownership of the store, they will embrace the idea of being great stewards of your company and live out its purpose.

#### Don't Just Train, Empower

Many retailers train employees well, and there are numerous tools available to help, including great resources from the North American Retail Hardware Association. However, training is only one piece of the puzzle. Empowering well-trained employees is a step many retailers miss.

Training employees ensures you can run a great operation. Empowering employees ensures they can run a great operation. See the difference?

If you find your employees are always bothering you with questions that you think they should be able to answer on their own, perhaps they aren't feeling empowered. If you find yourself giving employees directions because they're hesitant on what to do, they probably don't feel empowered to make decisions.

What are the two most likely reasons employees aren't empowered? Perhaps you, the business owner, feel the need to be involved in every decision, every time. Secondly, maybe employees are not encouraged to make decisions, and they're nervous to make a bad choice that will get them in trouble.

When a task doesn't fit an employee's training or job description, they will look at a duty that obviously needs to be done by someone and say with confidence the words unempowered employees say all the time: "It's not my job."

When you recruit great people, get them to buy into a purpose bigger than themselves and empower them to make decisions. If you do this, you will find yourself with a store full of the strongest, most confident and loyal employees you've ever had. ➔



**Dustin Kaehr** is a retail consultant with over 17 years of experience working with independent retailers, national retail chains and small businesses. He will present a keynote called "Customers Uncensored: What They Wish You Knew" at the NRHA All-Industry Conference, held in conjunction with the National Hardware Show®, May 9-11 in Las Vegas. Learn more about Dustin at [dustinkaehr.com](http://dustinkaehr.com).