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10 questions to ask prospective employees



How to ensure you get the help you want for your small business

Congratulations – your hard work has paid off, your business is growing, you’re ready to hire your first employee or add to your existing team. As a small-business owner, you want to be sure whomever you share your work space with is a good fit. Cissy Pau, Principal Consultant at Vancouver-based [Clear HR Consulting Inc.](#), offers some key queries to pose to hopeful candidates.

1. “Describe the top three skills you think are necessary to work at a small business.”

“If they say ‘sound policies and strict guidelines’ – which you’d find at a large corporation – they might not be the best fit for a smaller enterprise,” says Pau. You want to hear that flexibility and adaptability are important, she adds. “A job description for a small business might be fluid, the job-reporting relationship might be fluid, the nature of the work could change. You need [someone with] an ‘I’ll do what it takes’ attitude.”

2. “Describe your ideal work place.”

To learn if a candidate will fit with the environment you’re trying to create, Pau suggests finding out how they want to work. “I would say, ‘Paint me a picture of what you’re doing, what type of interaction you’re having with the people you work with, the business language you’re speaking,’” she says. Their answers will tell you what they want to do, which may not align with what you want them to do.

3. “Describe a situation in which you had to be entrepreneurial on the job.”

“Ask them how they’ve had to think like an entrepreneur, how they’ve made decisions that were in the best interests of the business,” Pau says, “not just to get their job done. Have they been on the lookout for other opportunities [that would benefit the business]?”

At the other end of the spectrum, your new hire should also be willing to clean the kitchen or run out for coffee. “So ask, ‘When have you been in such a

position before, and what did you like and not like about it?’ If the person says they didn’t like having to do something that was not in their job description, they might not be the best fit.”

4. “What’s the biggest advantage and disadvantage between working at our company versus where you’re working now?”

Pau says this will help discern whether a candidate really wants to work with you or simply wants a job. “If everything is perfect at their current job, why are they leaving?” she says.

Pau says one of the biggest mistakes entrepreneurs make is not interviewing at all. Another is not checking references, which can help you identify red flags in a potential new hire. “Interview the references almost as stringently as you interview the candidates,” she advises. “Ask what [the candidates] were like, confirm that they did what they said they did, and why they left.”

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