

RAVE REVIEWS PRESS RELEASE

Consultant Says Labor Pool is Deeper Than You Think

by Steve Coomes, Editor Pizza Marketplace

Some might find it hard to take Shelley Prueter seriously. Her business materials claim she's a respected restaurant management consultant, but in public speaking she likes to act a little silly; making the most outlandish claims about hiring employees, such as:

- * The restaurant talent pool is teeming with good help.
- * Turnover can all but disappear when you hire the right people.
- * Operators should only hire employees perfectly suited for the job.

Truth is, Prueter is dead serious about those statements. And anyone at any level in the business who doesn't think he should aim for the same lofty standards is asking for trouble, in her opinion.

"You need not hire out of desperation, ever," said Prueter, founder of Rave Reviews, a front-of-the-house restaurant consulting firm in Grafton, Ohio. Prueter shared her ideas in a seminar: "Relationship Recruiting: Hiring Intelligence, Experience and Motivation Isn't Enough," at the Mid-America Restaurant, Soft-Serve and Pizza Show, held Feb. 23-24 in Columbus, Ohio. "But that's exactly what people do sometimes in our business because they think there's no help out there."

Finding good employees, she said, isn't about looking harder, but looking always, interviewing regularly and selling one's restaurant as the place in town to work.

That begins by attracting quality employees with an inviting, intriguing help wanted ad placed in the classifieds. "You need to write the ad that sells the job," she said, "not just tell people you're hiring." In the ad, the job description should include statements about some of the company's goals (growth and excellence), its and values (high integrity and customer service), and the fact that the company is looking only for "winners and leaders." Prueter gave a few pointers on making an ordinary ad eye-catching, such as placing the letters "AAA" in the top left corner of ad box, in order to make it fall at the top alphabetically of the hospitality section in the classifieds. Below that, she said to leave a few lines of white space in order to make the bold-type title of the position you're hiring for stand out from the other ads.

Interviews provide inner-views

Bad restaurant hires also result from poor interviewing techniques, Prueter said. Sometimes operators sabotage an interview by projecting a negative attitude to prospective hires. More often, though, they fail to ask the right questions that will reveal the true nature of the candidate before them. "You need to make sure that whoever is doing the interview applies the energy to the meeting of minimally greeting a friend," Prueter said. "Be nice, be interested and make them feel at ease."

In her work with large restaurant companies and hotels, Prueter, learned to make quick but effective work of hundreds of interviews by asking a list of key questions (see "Inquiring Interviewers" below). Once asked these basics, she said the prospect's character, attitude and ability moves to the surface.

Good interviewers, she said, also ask open-ended questions that reveal a person's goals, standards, desires, passions and attitude. If a job candidate responds mechanically or predictably to such queries — "basically telling you what they think you want to hear" — it's a good bet his answers lack substance. On the other hand, the answers of honest candidates, she said, typically form recurring patterns of thought, beliefs, feelings and behaviors that match the job requirements.

Prueter calls candidates whose answers don't match up, "no" candidates — persons who she'd not consider hiring. And in her opinion, even those candidates an interviewer might call a "maybe," should be scratched

off the list. “I only hire a ‘yes,’ I never hire a ‘maybe,’ thinking they’re going to get better,” Prueter said. “The key is to find a person whose heart is in (this business). These are the great people who want to work for great restaurants.” Hiring only “yes” candidates, Prueter added, may seem unrealistic, but when operators see their labor turnover drop “because the right people are happy in their jobs,” they become believers.

“Jim Collins (author of the book “Good to Great”) said that hiring great employees comes down to getting the right people on the bus, the wrong people off the bus, and the right people in the right seats,” Prueter said. “When you have that kind of people, they are self-motivated and they don’t need babysitting.”

On the lookout

Prueter insisted that operators never stop looking for great talent and recommended they should conduct regular interviews regardless of whether they need new employees. “I’d look for prospects at least every three months. That way you can have a ready supply of people.” She stressed the value of asking friends and family about potential good hires, as well as making the effort to build relationships with sharp employees of other businesses. By building a deep reserve of staffers, an operator also gains the confidence to prune from the staff employees who don’t pass muster. Too often, she said, employers will keep bad employees because they fool themselves into thinking they’re better than no one at all.

“Do you have someone on your staff who needs to be fired, but you’ve not been willing to do it?” Prueter asked. “You need to be able to say, ‘Buddy, you’re out of here,’ because it’s not to your benefit to have a person in your organization who’s not willing to work up to the standards you set.”

At the end of her presentation, the silly side of Prueter returned when she led the audience in a pledge never to hire poor performers again. Grinning facetiously but speaking seriously, she led the group to raise their right hands and “promise to never again hire out of desperation, for the price we pay is too dear. I shall set the highest standards and hire only winners because only with great people can we achieve great things.”

INQUIRING INTERVIEWS

Rave Reviews founder Shelley Prueter believes that despite what appears to be a shallow labor pool, the waters are teeming with great talent. Finding the keepers can be simple if interviewers know how to get the right information from job seekers.

Following are her seven basic questions to get prospects talking. Based on their answers, she rates them as “yes,” “maybe” and “no” candidates. She said she never hires less than a “yes” prospect. Hiring a “maybe” and hoping they’ll improve is asking for trouble, she said. And when it comes to hiring a “no,” never do it.

The result of hiring only the best, she said, is a very high employee retention rate.

1. INFORMATION ABOUT GENERAL WORKFIELD

“Tell me about the jobs you’ve had in different industries and how they relate to the job for which you are applying?”

Yes: Knows the restaurant business and reports positive experiences with other companies

Maybe: Relative restaurant newcomer, but reports positive experiences.

No: Worked in restaurants before, now in unrelated field — signs of a job hopper — and worked for questionable operations.

2. EXPERIENCE

“Tell me about your restaurant experience and all the positions you’ve worked?”

Yes: Strong experiences with good companies.

Maybe: Just now getting experience working for reputable companies.

No: Never worked in field or is a job hopper.

3. EDUCATION

“Tell me about your educational goals and background?”

Yes: Education reveals propensity toward continuous learning, attends self-development courses if not higher education.

Maybe: High school graduate, but desires to take future courses.

No: Not a high school graduate, lacks goals for further development.

4. DRIVE

“Tell me about your greatest achievements.”

Yes: Set a challenging goal and achieved it.

Maybe: Thinks about goals and is beginning to work on some, but questions ability to move forward.

No: Has no specific goals.

5. CREATIVITY

“Tell me about the solutions you have implemented in challenges you’ve encountered.”

Yes: When faced with problems, always recommends solutions and can give examples

Maybe: Average imagination. Doesn’t take risks in decision making. Implements manager’s lead in decision making.

No: Has no idea what you’re talking about.

6. CONVERSATIONAL ABILITY

“Tell me about your passions, interests, hobbies and goals.”

Yes: Talks about outside interests with energy and conviction; has specific ambitions and can articulate them well.

Maybe: Has some ability to discuss topics but fumbles with articulation.

No: Cannot engage in meaningful conversation.

7. POISE

“Describe your personality during crises; give a few examples.”

Yes: Talks about how cool, calm and collected they are during peak business times or crises.

Maybe: Admits nervousness and stress at peak business times, but reveals average ability to cope.

No: Freaks out when too busy, appears overwhelmed.

8. APPEARANCE: While “what’s on the inside” of a person counts the most, Prueter said, how applicants dress tells much of their story. And for the purposes of a job interview, she said, if they haven’t dressed appropriately, they won’t dress appropriately for work.

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Rave Reviews offers clients an intimate understanding of management, sales, service and training that can only come from mentorship and real world experience. Rave Reviews: for everything it takes to make good restaurants great.