

# The YEBDC Small Business Information Column

by Sue Gingerich, Business Advisor

## "Screening Potential Employees--Should You Flip A Coin?"

Your small business has now grown to the point that you can actually hire your first employee. You have several great resumes right in front of you. But you can only afford to hire one person. Which one should it be? You dread the thought of doing interviews. Should you just flip a coin?

Most definitely not! Taking the time to conduct a thorough interview is as important as training that new employee. But if you don't make a living at doing interviews how should you go about it?

First of all, clarify what you expect of this new employee. If the position is new, create a detailed job description. This should include the duties and responsibilities. Be sure to include a line something to the effect of, "and all other duties as assigned" just in case you do forget something, or the job changes slightly over time. The skills and qualifications required for the position are also needed.

Once you have narrowed down your selection, based on how well the applicants match with the job description, you are ready to conduct your interviews. ALMOST, that is. Next you need to prepare yourself for the interviews. Like anything in business, preparation is half the battle. Prepare an outline for your interviews, such as:

1. Introductions and ice breaker
2. Overview of the company and position
3. Determine why the individual is interested in working for your organization. (What do they actually know about your organization?)
4. Determine how well they match the actual job. (See below for more information on this.)
5. Give further details about the job. (i.e. start date, salary etc.)
6. Conclude the interview

Once you have prepared an outline, you will want to develop a questioning format that you can use to determine how well suited the person is for the position. Use closed questions for short direct responses. "Did you complete college or university?" "Do you consider yourself a hard worker?" Open ended questions will help you to gather broader information: "What did you like the most and the least about your last boss?" or "Describe what your perfect boss would be like". "Where do you see yourself in five years?" is a good question to help you see their long term goals. It is usually a good idea to use at least one or two hypothetical questions, "If the following situation happened to you at work, how would you handle it?"

The other item you should prepare prior to the interview is a checklist. How does the applicant respond or stack up to each of the areas in your criteria? A checklist is much easier to use during the interview than stopping to make notes in front of the applicant. Also allow yourself about 5 to 15 minutes between applicants to make more detailed notes, and to regroup before you start your next interview. NOW you are ready to book your interviews.

Once you have completed all your interviews, take a breather, however do not delay too long in reviewing the information you have gathered. Make your choice and then call all the applicants back. It is not a bad idea to start with the one you want to hire, just in case they turn you down. If they do, then call the second choice on your list.

Do not gamble on getting great employees. Instead of flipping that coin, invest it in your company and your new employee.

If you have a small business and have a question or problem that you think The YEBDC could help you with please call or write to: The Yellowhead East Business Development Corporation, Box 249, Sangudo, Alberta, T0E 2A0  
1-800-556-0328 or 1-780-785-2900, e mail: [yebdc@yebdc.ab.ca](mailto:yebdc@yebdc.ab.ca), or access our Website at:  
[www.yebdc.ab.ca](http://www.yebdc.ab.ca)

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