



# HR Toolbox: Selecting an Animal Caretaker

## Recruiting Strategies

In finding your next new stockperson hire, consider options other than widespread newspaper and internet advertising. Alternatives exist that can serve to provide equal or, at times, a better group of qualified candidates without drawing unwanted attention to your livestock operation. Some good options include:

- **Find success with an internal referral program.** Programs can be structured in numerous ways. Some offer incentives/rewards to employees for each referral resulting in a successful hire and a designated length of service (often six to twelve months). Others focus their use to specific job openings particularly those requiring a special skill set. However set up, the goal and practice of the referral program should encourage employees to refer individuals whom they view as some of the “best colleagues they’ve had the pleasure to work with”.
- **Hire a third-party firm.** Using its business name to advertise openings, the firm will also often screen out unqualified applicants for you. This method can be effective in some of the other stages listed below as well. Worthwhile firms should commit to regular communication and have a good understanding of the job position, qualifications, experience, etc., that you are seeking.
- **Develop your networking infrastructure.** Utilize your network of agriculture associates, vendors and organizations to get the word out that you have an open position. To add extra validation, prepare a packet for distribution to interested parties that includes basic company information, the job description and a method to get in contact with you.
- **Consider Partnering with Educational Institutions.** Consider candidates from area high schools (and programs) and particularly area colleges that support agricultural programs. Direct hire or sponsoring student internships is a great way to take advantage of potential young talent and introduce new people to rewarding careers in the pork industry.
- **Go to Web sites where candidates are posting their resumes.** For greater success, gravitate to ag-related sites (job boards) when your location or job position scope affords you the opportunity. Be prepared, however, to spend more time weeding through potential candidates. Generally, this method supports a search where candidates are being selected based on a list of core characteristics rather than on current swine experience.
- **Post Opening in Appropriate Public Locations.** Work with vendors, partners or local retail establishments that potential candidates may visit frequently to post your opening. Many such establishments will be happy to do this as a value-added item in your relationship.

Referral  
Program



Re-examine the integrity of your recruiting function on a regular basis. To reduce the chances of a costly bad hire as well as give you a fighting chance to build a cohesive workforce, consider the following:

- **Incorporate a centralized hiring function.** Under no circumstances should someone who walks into a barn unexpectedly/unannounced, be hired on the spot. Human Resources representatives at a centralized hiring site or, at a minimum, the designation of a regular contact person will ensure accountability of the process and, in effect, act as the conscience of the operation. All candidates must go through the proper screening and hiring process. If you are a small organization where individuals may be charged with different responsibilities, encourage those individuals in charge of hiring to set specific time periods aside to focus on the hiring process.
- **Train and inform managers.** Most managers get thrown into the hiring responsibility without much guidance, which may result in low employee retention and poor performance of the new employee. All manager-level employees should be informed of the company's policies, procedures and philosophies related to its recruiting and hiring process. Emphasize accountability and teamwork to promote a positive response. Bottom line, training prevents legal problems and unnecessary labor expense. There are many articles, job aids and programs available on the Internet for those interested.

## Candidate Selection

During the screening and selection process, you must drill deep, to uncover the best candidate. Doing so, however, adds time to the process. Improve your chances of making a good hire by considering some of the following recruitment tips:

- **Pre-screen candidates.** This is a must, even when hiring for entry-level positions. Doing so saves you valuable interviewing time and keeps you from lowering the bar just to get the position filled. Thoroughly review all candidates' applications and/or resumes before selecting candidates to interview. When your pool of candidates requires further narrowing, conduct a brief phone interview. Limit your inquiries to qualifications and abilities necessary to perform the job and perhaps salary expectations. Schedule interviews with only those who fit the qualifications for your position.
- **Identify red flags within the application.** The application itself can be quite revealing about your candidate. Stay away from candidates who have unexplained long spans of time between jobs, have frequently changed jobs in recent years, haven't listed references and/or display laziness in completing the application.
- **Prepare candidates for the interview.** Prepare candidates by briefing them on your company, the details of the position, etc., prior to beginning the interview. This might be something you want to cover when you contact the person to schedule the interview. This allows time in the interview to concentrate on the important issues like determining if the candidate's skills and qualities are a good fit for the company.
- **Utilize an interview team.** A team of two to three interviewers in a team is optimal. Any more can be too intimidating for the candidate and feel more like an interrogation. By nature, one decision-maker will tend to hire people similar to him or her. The team approach encourages a harder look at the skills and experience that goes along with the candidate's personality. Interview teams are more prepared and improve the casual process an interview can sometimes become. Conversation is necessary and informative. "Getting chatty" or being "too conversational" may distract from getting answers to job-related abilities, and could lead to legal trouble. Interview team members should evaluate each other. The types of questions should be discussed and decided upon ahead of time and members should determine who will ask what. The candidate's would-be direct supervisor should be a member of the interview team, whenever possible.



- **Ask good, probing (but legal) interview questions.** Prepare the basic questions ahead of time to ensure that each is job-related, not personal. In a nutshell, if you don't need to know, don't ask. Consider how you have worded your question to stay within legal bounds. For example, you cannot ask, "Are you a U.S. citizen?" However, you may ask, "Are you authorized to work in the United States?" Questions also should dig into details but remain within the acceptable lines of questioning when the qualifications you are looking for require it. See *Interview Questions*.
- **Seek Contrary Evidence:** When a candidate seems almost too good to be true, he or she might be. If you find yourself thinking that the person is perfect, challenge yourself to seek contrary evidence. Your desire to find a perfect candidate can sometimes cloud your vision. You may want to consider asking a question such as this one in your interview, "It sounds like you have done a fantastic job in the past as an animal caretaker. But obviously we aren't all perfect. Tell me about a time when things didn't go as planned." Conversely, if you find yourself feeling like the person just doesn't fit, don't give up too fast. Ask questions to make sure that your judgment of the person is on target.
- **Check and verify validity of references and perform background checks.** Don't rely solely on the interview when making a hiring decision. Keep in mind, no matter how complete your interview was, a candidate after a job may offer exactly what you want to hear. For an animal caretaker position it is recommended that, at a minimum, you follow up on references and perform background checks. Same-day offers are not always possible, and there is long-term value in maintaining the integrity of the hiring process. For further information on this topic, see *Background Checks*.

### Interview Questions

### Background Checks

## Selection Standards

After completing the interview process it's time to make a decision on which candidate to hire. Here are some things to keep in mind:

**Know what you are looking for and do not settle for less.** A typical "rookie" hiring mistake is to jump into the process without knowing exactly what one is looking for. Several candidates, good and bad, might appear to fit the bill. You run the risk of making a hire on a first impression and perhaps not getting to those behaviors that drive long-term success in the position.

- **Identify the qualifications and traits required.** Develop an assessment form listing the essential functions of the job (or use an updated job description as your template) and any required certification (e.g. a forklift certification) or legal requirements (e.g. a valid driver's license). Then begin asking questions of your current workforce, in order to describe what makes a good hire. This may be difficult at first. A great way to begin is to consider the characteristics of the people who are succeeding in the position and other desired characteristics such as work ethic. You can then review the information you received from each candidate to see how he/she stacks up.



- **Experience vs. Potential.** Consider this: is experience in your field necessary or do characteristics that display motivation and a willingness to learn make for a better hire? Be open to candidates with experience in other trades. Consider that a good hire may be a person possessing the general characteristics that would allow for success in a stockperson role.
- **First impressions.** Think twice before hiring a person who failed to come prepared for the interview, who gave inconsistent answers, appeared to lack flexibility or ambition or often the deal breaker, spoke negatively of his/her previous employer.