

## Features

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# Recruitment & Onboarding

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Regardless of your guess about the post-pandemic business climate, shifting employment trends will remain. Unemployment may increase and make recruitment easier, but we won't return to anything like "normal." Because of the importance of this topic, we're summarizing tactics of other garden centers without devoting space to attribution. Thanks are owed to readers who shared these ideas at industry events like MANTS, Cultivate, Tessman Hort Academy, The Garden Center Group events, other industry gatherings and follow-up phone calls.

Check off ideas to discuss with your team for later adoption and adaptation by your organization. These new ideas will require more staff or management time than in prior years. Make the resource commitment now or be sorry later. It's your choice.

## Recruitment Concepts—Do Values Really Count?

- Corporate values are important to most job seekers. Convey your company's values through direct communication with your existing team.
- Invest an hour Googling "recruitment videos" to see how some companies attract applications. Small budget? Consider how effectively Ritter's in Spokane, Washington ([www.4ritter.com/employment](http://www.4ritter.com/employment)), and Dewayne's in Selma, North Carolina ([shopdewaynes.com/pages/join-our-team](http://shopdewaynes.com/pages/join-our-team)), encourage their employees to share the joy of their job. Who can more credibly share your values and passion better than your existing employees?
- Company values can include highlighting what makes your center a different and fun place to work. How many organizations advertise Donut Wednesday to prospective employees?
- Consider cash or other incentives for recommending successful applicants. Possibly \$250 the day the new hire starts and an additional \$250 for each of the next four quarters. This gives the recommending employee additional motivation to mentor and support the new hire.
- Check out [www.glassdoor.com](http://www.glassdoor.com) and other websites where prospective employees can get "impartial" opinions about working for you. Encourage existing employees to contribute reviews, especially if former employees with a bad attitude posted negative reviews.

## Try It—You'll (Maybe) Like It

- Once an initial interview determines a candidate may be suitable, extend an invitation to come to work for one paid four-hour shift. Split the prospective employee's time between existing employees so multiple opinions can be shared about the applicant.

- Ideally you'll determine any passions for garden center work the prospect has. Be sure those areas are included in their "sample day," as well as necessary areas not on the applicant's favorites list.
- Some companies intentionally disrupt the prospect's schedule to help with a less-than-ideal chore that just arose—like unloading a truck. This assesses how flexible the applicant is when unscheduled and less-than-fun tasks arise.
- All current employees who worked with the prospect must agree to mentor the new hire, giving the new hire multiple resources.
- Before "hiring" someone for a four-hour shift, confirm coverage with your workers' comp carrier. If the employee is hired can you flow the four-hour payment through your payroll system? If not hired, many retailers treat them as an independent contractor.
- Another way to find trial employees is to co-op with schools where students' work is part of their school credit.
- Garden centers (and growers) using these students report great success. It's "fake news" that kids don't want to work. Ensure they have assigned tasks. Expect results. Inspect their work to ensure compliance. Treat them as adults. Problem students showing unacceptable behavior will likely withdraw from the program. If not, deal with them immediately, maintaining an engaged workforce. Some will apply to be employees after the school program ends.
- Many employers in this program happily hire the students for paid work beyond the assigned school time. Check the legal requirements in your area.
- Revisit former employees who left under good conditions and welcome them back. Do not assume people are comfortable asking "for their job back." Make it clear you want them to return. Ask them for referrals to friends or family.
- Ask customers to refer prospective employees. Some retailers report great success, including customers who apply. Some customers have proven through their treatment of existing employees they don't have the temperament for retail.
- People working weird shifts are great part-timers. Firefighters whose days off are scheduled months in advance can be available for weekend or holiday work. Oil field workers, whose schedule is two weeks on and two weeks off, want the peace and enjoyment garden centers offer. Not matching oil field pay doesn't matter for these people. Another center reports nurses are effective part-timers because they appreciate the comparative chill of horticulture and usually have superb relationship skills.

## Rockledge Gardens



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## Onboarding—Keeping the New Employee Engaged

- Enthusiasm will never be greater than the new hire's first day. They should be greeted warmly and given focus by their new managers, not allowed a single minute to stand around unengaged.
- Despite today's lessened use of business cards, many who work in our industry are the first in their family to carry a card. Have their cards ready the first day. Usually your new employee will hand out cards to

all their friends and family as they talk excitedly about their new job to everyone they know. This publicly reiterates their commitment to your business.

- During the interview process you should have uncovered the new employee's motivators. Discuss those on the first day and regularly thereafter. Remind them these can come to life as the employee progresses. Outline the steps and show a realistic timeline to reach their goals.
- Does the employee understand how to further their knowledge? Are they clear what educational time is on the clock and what is their own investment in their career? Again, check local employment laws so your hourly exposure is fixed. The best time for them to study on their own is when they're enthusiastic. It's difficult/impossible to engage an employee who feels stupid on the job.
- After 30 days, have the courage to ask what the employee sees their job to be. Don't interrupt. After they've described their job in detail, consider how many times they referenced the word "customer." New hires get focused on the task, not the mission. Your job is to ensure they're aligned with your company's goals.
- Eliminating burnout or frustration requires constant vigilance. What would they accomplish if they had more or different tools at their disposal? What frustrations aren't being resolved?

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- Company-sponsored IRA
- Monthly bonuses
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- Donuts on Wednesdays!



- Check out [www.SeedYourFuture.org](http://www.SeedYourFuture.org) for recruitment ideas and supporting tools. Register your store to be part of Green Career Week.
- Start meetings 15 minutes early to talk about issues not on the agenda and solicit "off-the-record" comments and feedback.
- If a new employee turns out to be a bad fit, rapidly help them move on with dignity. You have an obligation to the entire team to ensure every employee contributes

to the company's goals. Can you imagine an employee saying, "My job is getting harder because you don't fire the losers and I have to pick up their workload"?

- If you have seasonal employees, send personalized handwritten letters at the season's end. Tell them how much you appreciate what they did (be specific) and emphasize you're counting on them to return next year. Keep communication open and follow up.
- Leaders grow more leaders. Are you the type of boss your employees deserve?

Recruitment and retention will take more management time going forward than ever before. If that workload falls to you, what will you delegate to someone else so you can focus on building and keeping the team? Hint: Get rid of things you don't like and therefore don't handle effectively. Find people who like to do those things and help them learn these new skills for your benefit and theirs. Remember—building a super strong team takes commitment, patience and perseverance. **GP**

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*Bill would love to hear from you with questions, comments or ideas for future stories. He's a Green Profit columnist and owner of the consulting firm McCurry Associates Inc. Please contact him at [wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com](mailto:wmccurry@mccurryassoc.com) or (609) 731-8389.*