



Keep Your Friends Close & Your Family Closer (Especially When They're Staff)

One of the greatest complaints small employers have is how difficult it is to find good employees. But there's one place they often fail to search for new job applicants – the families and friends of their best employees. After all, current employees who have great work attitudes probably have brothers and sisters with great work attitudes too. Before rushing headlong into hiring family or friends, consider the ups and downs.

Advantages

Family members and close friends often come into a business with a strong commitment to the company, more so than the average employee.

Because relatives may think of the company as an extension of the family, they may be more likely to be flexible and work into the evening and over weekends when needed, anticipating that they will personally benefit from the long-term success of the company.

You know family and friends well and are familiar with their capabilities and shortcomings. This may enable you to place them in just the right position. Also, your familiarity may allow you to train them more quickly than other new employees.

Disadvantages

A relative may take advantage of family status, knowing that it's hard to fire them when you're sitting down at the dinner table with them that night.

Other employees may see the hiring as nepotism, especially if the family member is given preferential treatment or given a position without having the appropriate experience or training.

Family problems can be brought into the workplace. It's one thing to have a family disagreement at night and be able to leave it when going to work in the morning. But it is entirely different when you're facing the same person at work; the strain may affect the entire business.

Managing The Mix

Hiring friends and relatives is tricky. If not handled well, it can sour the work environment. But there can also be great benefits if you proceed carefully.

Business Is Not A Charity.

Do not hire someone's relative just because they 'need' a job. If someone has trouble holding a job, you don't want them either. Write a detailed job description. Make it clear that if the relative or friend doesn't perform as expected, he or she will be let go. Hire on a probationary basis, establishing a two-week or month-long period to see how things work out.

The Right 'Stuff'

Ask specific, detailed questions about the relative's qualifications before you agree to interview them. People rarely see their relatives clearly. They're likely to make comments such as "He's a wonderful guy" or "She's so smart." That doesn't tell you if they've had relevant work experience or training. While you want to hire people with the right attitude, leave yourself an out: "I'm not sure Chris has the right computer skills we need."

Don't Have Too Many Chiefs

It is advisable not to have relatives reporting to one another or working too closely together. It's one thing to have siblings work for the same company in different areas, but if they work together on the same project, you're likely to see old family patterns emerge. If something goes wrong, don't be surprised if you hear: "He started it." "No, she started it."

The Trouble With Spouses

Spouses or domestic partners working together can present many difficulties. There are logistical issues: vacations or family emergencies may leave you doubly shorthanded. And behavioural issues: a terrific, eager worker may change dramatically with a spouse around.

The dynamics of a couple's relationship are stronger (and usually less comprehensible) than a boss/employee relationship. Moreover, in a small, new, or very risky company, having both breadwinners work for the same company puts a lot of stress on a family and their budget. That's a lot of extra stress on you.

Be Cruel To Be Kind

Be toughest on your relatives. It is essential to set ground rules so that relatives are clear they are not entitled to a 'free ride.' It is also important for other staff members to see this strategy in place. Before hiring a relative, make it clear to them that they will have to prove themselves and be held to the highest standards. Never supervise a relative directly.

Don't Play Favourites

Make sure all the rules apply to all employees. Everyone has to be qualified, and they have to do their jobs well. Otherwise, they will not be hired, or they'll get fired. Even if they're your mother.

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