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Small firms need to recruit wisely

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Owner-operators are often so caught up in the running of their companies that they neglect their staff, who then move to employers who actually deliver what they promised at the interview.

That's why small businesses starting out should take a strategic approach to employing staff if they want to beat the big end of town.

"More forward-thinking businesses put a lot of thought into planning before they open up," said Hayley Crealy, a director of Brisbane recruitment company Talentpath, which opened for business in May.

Ms Crealy, who has worked for large recruitment firms, said she and the company's other two directors worked out what was needed to make their business attractive to the market before opening for business.

"It was important to have the right tools from the beginning," she said.

While she acknowledged that big firms often attracted staff because of their well-known brand names, she said small businesses had features that could be used to attract people.

But the starting point for a successful recruitment process involved carefully deciding precisely what the job entailed and what was required of the individual, remembering that employing the wrong person could be disastrously expensive.

Once the job and its requirements were defined, she recommended that the advertisement be drawn up with the job title as the prominent heading. While adverts with the salary displayed often attracted a larger and more relevant response,



Hayley Crealy recommends forward planning.

Photo: GLENN HUNT

Ms Crealy warned that many studies had found salary to be less important to candidates than things such as opportunity for progression, management style and location.

"Be sure to highlight other benefits besides the financial package, such as growth or promotion opportunities," Ms Crealy said.

Other tips included emphasising the smaller size of the business as a positive.

"Smaller companies have

more one-on-one management, the CEO will usually work side-by-side with employees."

Another advantage of small businesses, according to Ms Crealy, was that they were slower to lay off staff in times of uncertainty, while big companies were the first to wield the axe.

There's no doubt that small businesses face unique challenges when seeking to attract and retain quality staff.

Chandler Macleod Consulting's research found that care-

fully tailored benefits were the key to attracting job seekers, as well as delivering on promises.

In what should be a wake-up call to small businesses that don't put in the hard yards before employing staff, the same research found that new employees made their dissatisfaction known very quickly.

Eight per cent of SME employees decided that they hated the job on their first day, compared with 1 per cent of employees in larger organisations.

The good news was that once they stayed, SME employees generally stuck around for longer than their larger company counterparts. About a quarter of staff in larger organisations leave in the first two years compared with just 10 per cent of SME staff, the survey noted.

Executive general manager of Chandler Macleod, David Reynolds, said it was vital that small business owners got it right from day one.

"It's about delivering on the promises made to job seekers during the hiring process," Mr Reynolds said.

Smaller businesses might not be able to compete with bigger organisations on salary levels or bonus schemes, but Mr Reynolds, like Ms Crealy, advised that consultation could help small business owners ensure that their staff benefits counted for something and were addressing the individual needs of their staff.

"This is the great benefit of SMEs – they can be much more nimble when it comes to offering tailored benefits and have a much greater capacity to respond to the changing needs of individual employees," Mr Reynolds said.

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