

HR Insights

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Recruiting and Hiring Winter and Holiday Seasonal Employees

Winter is the busiest time for many organizations. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, retailers added 509,300 jobs during the 2022 holiday season alone. Many employers hire seasonal workers to help manage the demands of the holiday season. For example, online retailers often see a surge in activity around the holidays, as do organizations in hospitality. Yet, bulk hiring workers can present unique challenges for employers, who often must recruit and train employees in a short period of time. While these employees may only be employed for the holiday season, they represent an employer's brand and can meet the demands and obligations of customers, which ultimately affects an organization's bottom line. This article provides guidance on how employers can successfully recruit and hire winter and seasonal employees.

What Is Seasonal Employment?

Seasonal employment refers to temporarily hiring employees during a specific time of year. Hiring around the holiday season is one of the most common types of seasonal employment as many organizations ramp up production and sales to meet consumers' increased demand during the holidays. Seasonal workers can help employers fill workforce gaps and complete crucial tasks and responsibilities without hiring full-time employees who won't be needed after the busy season ends. Students, in particular, are often available around the holiday season and contribute to seasonal employment.

Hiring seasonal workers is typically more cost-effective than hiring full-time employees and provides employers with workforce flexibility. It also allows employers to

evaluate employees on a trial basis before determining if a more permanent position will be offered.

Challenges to Hiring Seasonal Employees

Although there are many benefits to using seasonal employees during the holidays, there are also some unique challenges. The following are drawbacks to hiring seasonal workers:

- **High recruiting costs**—Many seasonal workers don't return to their employers the following year, so employers must actively recruit and hire new employees yearly. This can make recruiting expensive and increases the time spent onboarding.
- **Less time to train**—Due to the relatively short period of employment, employers typically have less time to onboard and train seasonal employees. Additionally, training a new batch of seasonal workers every year can be costly, especially if there are few returning employees.
- **Productivity issues**—When seasonal workers are insufficiently trained or not trained at all, their productivity can decrease significantly, which impacts the cost-effectiveness of hiring them. Furthermore, seasonal workers may be less committed to their work than full-time employees, which can negatively impact their work performance and productivity.

- **Brand representation**—No matter how short the period of employment, seasonal workers are representatives of an employer’s brand. For example, a seasonal worker with a bad attitude can negatively impact customer service reviews, harming an organization’s reputation.

Recruiting Seasonal Workers

In a tight labor market, employers may struggle to find qualified seasonal workers that align with their organizational goals. A strong recruitment strategy is crucial to attracting high-quality job candidates interested in seasonal work. The following strategies can help employers recruit seasonal workers:

- **Plan ahead.** Scrambling to recruit and hire seasonal workers in the weeks and days before the busy season can cause employers to hire the wrong employees or be unable to fill workforce gaps. Employers should determine when their busy season is, how many employees they need to hire and how they plan to do so.
- **Focus on job postings.** Differentiating seasonal job postings from permanent positions can help employers find interested individuals. Additionally, seasonal workers may expect different information in job postings (e.g., pay rates, opportunities to receive benefits, and the required days and shifts). Job descriptions should be accurate and up to date.
- **Target your search.** Employers can simplify recruitment by considering their target audience for job postings and focusing on them. For example, a retailer looking to hire employees for the month of December could consider posting job listings on a local community college campus, where many students may be looking for work during their winter break.
- **Set clear expectations.** Employers should look for candidates interested in seasonal work and be transparent about employee expectations, including length of employment and responsibilities. If there is an opportunity for a

more permanent position after the holiday or winter season ends, employers can communicate this during the interview process.

- **Understand what workers want.** Recruiting for seasonal positions can be as challenging as finding employees for long-term positions. Therefore, it’s crucial that employers understand what job candidates are looking for. Most seasonal workers are interested in weekly pay, flexible scheduling, sign-on or end-of-season bonuses, discounted services or products from the employer and the opportunity for permanent work.

Hiring Seasonal Workers

Hiring seasonal workers who are compatible with organizational values can significantly affect the success and productivity of a workforce. Although employers may be tempted to rush through the process to fill workforce gaps, it’s essential that organizations take the time to screen and train new hires adequately. This can significantly impact seasonal workers’ productivity and improve their chances of returning to the organization the following year. The following are tips for how to hire seasonal workers:

- **Screen applicants.** An unqualified seasonal hire can be just as costly as a permanent one. Therefore, it’s critical that employers don’t skip employee screening (e.g., background checks, calling references) for seasonal workers due to the short term of employment. Although there may be a wide pool of walk-in job candidates searching for seasonal jobs, employers should avoid lowering their standards and hire from reputable sources or referrals. This may increase an employer’s chance of finding high-quality hires early.
- **Onboard new hires.** The onboarding process is critical to properly prepare seasonal workers for employment. Without proper onboarding, seasonal workers may become overwhelmed, make mistakes or quit at the height of the busy season, which can create staffing and productivity issues. Employers can reduce the likelihood of productivity and performance

issues by dedicating the time and effort to preparing seasonal workers for employment. This can involve training seasonal workers before their first week of work, pairing seasonal workers with more experienced employees and encouraging well-performing seasonal workers with recognition.

- **Treat seasonal workers like permanent employees.** Although seasonal workers may only be employed for a short period of time, treating them well can boost productivity and improve the chances that they'll return the following season. Furthermore, because seasonal employees are typically less loyal than permanent employees, poor treatment could cause them to leave midseason or perform poorly. Employers can train managers and supervisors on how to treat seasonal workers. They can also consider conducting exit interviews of seasonal workers to understand how the experience could be improved.
- **Focus on retention.** When seasonal workers enjoy their job experience, they're more likely to return the following year, which can significantly reduce hiring costs and the burden of onboarding and training new hires. Employers can improve retention by offering attractive incentives, such as flexible work arrangements and bonuses for returning employees.

Conclusion

Successfully recruiting and hiring seasonal employees during the winter and holiday seasons can significantly impact an organization's bottom line. Although seasonal employment comes with certain challenges, employers can use it as an opportunity to improve branding, boost seasonal productivity and create a pipeline of talented employees for future seasons.

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