

Hiring the right people is all about chemistry

Hiring the right people is something that challenges all employers because having the right people in the right job can make all the difference to your business. However, it is one thing to be a pharmacist, providing professional advice and services; it is quite another to be a human resources expert. Robert Andrews, director at Statim Finance (AAH Pharmaceuticals specialist financial service division) provides some guidance

People are the most important asset of any business, particularly businesses that come into contact with many regular customers, such as a pharmacy. Investing wisely in recruitment is likely to pay dividends in the long term. Therefore, it is important that pharmacists consider all the elements involved with recruitment from defining job roles, to interviewing, and to selecting the appropriate person.

Defining the roles

It is often wise to start by taking a careful look at the position that needs to be filled. Outline the key responsibilities and duties to help form the basis of a formal job description. From this you should be able to develop a person specification that determines exactly what skills, experiences and personal attributes you are looking for in each candidate according to each post available.

Also, do not be afraid to seek opinions from colleagues even if they do not work in pharmacy. Use them to carry out your own market research to highlight salary expectations as well as other relevant benefits, financial or non-financial, such as bonus payments and training allowances.

With a job description clearly drawn up, remuneration decided upon and a clear idea of the type of person you are seeking to employ, the next stage is to consider how to generate applications. You could use conventional methods such as local and industry advertising through newspapers, job centres and specialist recruitment publications.

However, you should also consider spreading the word through the local and professional grapevine. There is also a wealth of recruitment consultants who can offer a highly specialised and effective service, tailored to your individual needs, but these do charge a fee, which can vary considerably, so check details up front.

Always remember that recruitment ultimately comes down to how well you sell the position to potential recruits. Whatever methods you use to attract applications do not be afraid to "hard sell" the benefits of the job.

Short listing and interviewing

Once you have placed your advertisement or commissioned a recruitment specialist, be prepared to filter out those candidates that do not meet your specified needs and criteria. You should always aim to make a shortlist consisting of the top six candidates to interview and a back-up list of around four. It is, however, crucial that you are ruthless with your choice at this stage. Take every application on merit and shortlist strictly according to your original objectives, ie, your person specification.

Beforehand, you will need to decide on the venue in which to conduct the interview — will it be on site in an office within the pharmacy or will it be at a hired office location nearby? You should also develop a formal structure to ensure you remain focused on obtaining the right information about each candidate. Make sure you prepare a strong series of open questions to probe as much as possible for the information required.

The interview is the most crucial part of the recruitment process and it is likely to be the first time you meet the prospective employee. Take time to set the scene, clearly explaining all aspects of the job, making particular reference to your aims for the post and how it fits into the wider pharmacy market.

As the interview develops it is important not to make assumptions. Question your candidates on any qualifications and ask for further evidence to support their claims. Also pay particular attention to past experience. Gauge their level of capability and question any unusual gaps in their employment history. In particular, you may want to find out how many sick days have been taken during the past two years in order to determine their reliability.

It may be the case that you also want to set a practical test. This will ultimately depend on the position for which you are recruiting, but think about simple tests in arithmetic or English, which can both provide a lot of information about your candidates.

Selection and welcome

With the interview over, a decision must be made. However, do not pick the best of a bad bunch, it is better not to employ at all than to employ the wrong person. Try to imagine your chosen candidate in the role with the team around them. Ask yourself whether their personality fits, as this is often just as vital as skills, experience and capability.

Once you have made your final decision, you should make an offer of employment via telephone followed by a formal letter of agreement as an official confirmation. Your offer should clearly highlight the main remuneration terms, that is subject to a standard probationary period (standard is three months) and subject to suitable references. Make a point of following up all references from previous employers in writing immediately upon receipt of acceptance.

Also, ensure your candidate does not require any specialist work permits. Ask for P45s, P60s and birth certificates if necessary in order to double check. Once they have agreed to accept the job, begin to draw up a formal contract of employment — you should seek legal advice before the interview if no contract already exists.

Finally, put aside some time to welcome your new employee to the business. Carry out an induction to help introduce them to the company and other members of staff as well as important procedures, such as health and safety. You may also want to assign a mentor to help ease them into their new surroundings and then monitor their progress during the probationary period ready for a review at the end.