

## Transcription - Shortage of Staff and Right Fit

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Welcome back, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec. We have a case study for you today that is about managing short-staffing issues or issues generally about staff. The case study revolves around someone in an industry that is chronically short-staffed. Before we started recording, we talked about what industry that might be. Now, this is my case study, so I know that this relates to the hospitality industry, but I'm sure that there are other industries that are short-staffed in terms of trained people. We know that's the case. We see ads all the time for more money for TAFE so that apprentices can be trained up in all sorts of areas.

My elder son has a mechanical car workshop and he is forever struggling to get apprentices at any stage and then trained tradesmen who will stay in the industry.

I guess that's a different issue, but that one particularly, the automotive industry is an industry where blokes, for the most part, go into it because they love cars.

They do it for a few years. It's a dirty industry. I don't think, he's over 40 now, but I don't think I've ever see this fingernails clean in 20 plus years of him being in the industry. They love it. They want to do it, but it's not a long term profession in terms of being on the tools all the time, because of those reasons, because it's hot and hard and sweaty and dirty. Mostly it's dirty and you can't go home and have a family life when you come home covered in grease. I know his wife, for a long time, used to work in the industry as well. She always wore black and we asked her at one stage why and she said, "I just get so dirty, just being in the workshop, I get dirty without touching anything."

So there's those issues that are industry specific, but we can get back to the staffing one. There are lots of industries, I think, at the moment that are chronically short of staff. They'll get staff in for a while. If I talk about the hospitality industry, a lot of it, I'm based in the Hunter Valley, so I am surrounded by people who are desperate for staff in terms of hospitality. A lot of their staff are transient workers because they're not full-time jobs. They're casual, they're part-time. If they're lucky, they're permanent part-time. But mostly they're casual or part-time. They're university students, so they go into it with little or no training, but they get training on the job. They do, for the most part, have to have an RSA, so Responsible Service of Alcohol qualification. So there is a qualification involved in it that they have to get it, it's just not ticking the boxes. There is a course they have to do, they do get assessed on some of the things they have to do. The job might sound easy, but they're not because it's constantly customer-focused. It can often be very pressured because if you're in a venue where lots of people come in and they all come in at the one time and they all want their drinks at the one time, you're working under that time pressure as well. I know that is also the case for the kitchen staff, that they can't get enough kitchen staff trained or otherwise because it's another unpleasant environment. They go into it because they love food, but it's the hard slog, it's hot, and it's uncomfortable, and it's noisy, and it's all very time-pressured to get meals out of a certain time, looking a certain way. There are training timelines that need to be considered as well as the staffing.

What this person has said is, that I'm chronically short-staffed, I have skilled people, but they're just not the right fit for this organisation. What are my options?

Now obviously, they're holding on to the staff because it's too hard to get new staff or other staff or replacement staff. I think the options, honestly, are very limited because if you've got people who are qualified, who can do the job, who can work at the level that you need them to, when you say they're not right fit for this organisation, what does that actually mean?

Does it mean that they don't understand your core values? So you haven't given them the right amount of training in terms of your organisation and what you expect, because they've already trained in the industry, you've just expected them to come in and work. If we use a bar person or a kitchen hand as the example, they know what the job involves. They walk into a bar environment or a kitchen and they see that all of the tools that they need for their job are there. All you might train them on, in terms of the bar person, is your point of sale system, how they put through their orders. For the kitchen staff, it might be, here's the menu, this is the prep that you do, this is how we call out to say that the orders are ready. Is that the only training they've had?

Have they actually been introduced to your organisation and what your values are in terms of their role within the organisation? Is there a job brief? Is there a job description that they can look at? Because for the most part, I would say that in my experience with a number of the venues around here, is that they just, when they advertise, they just say we want bar staff, we want kitchen hands and that's it. Then the people come in and they talk to them and they say, well, you can start, you know, do your trial shift on this day. They pass the trial shift, that's it, that's the introduction to the organisation.

My concern with this particular case study is that you're judging people without having given them the opportunity to show what they're worth. If we take it six months down the track, okay, so you've taken that on board, you've told them what the organisation is, you've given them what the measures are, that you're going to sit down and talk to them in terms of their performance. If you still feel that they're not the right fit for the organisation, you need to be really specific about why they're not a right fit. At the moment you can't do it. But after you've done all that, you can sit down and say, look, we expect you to be able to interact with the customers in a different way. We've told you that, we've talked to you about, this is the organisation, this is what it is and we feel that you're not doing it. Then you've got some basis for saying, okay, we're not a right fit, perhaps you need to think about other options. There might be other options within your organisation. If not, it's thanks, but no thanks. When you look this time, because you've done the work about getting the job brief together and thinking about how you do that onboarding and that introduction to your organisation and what you expect, you're not going to pick the wrong people. It's very unlikely that you'll pick the wrong fit people this time around.

I think that organisations are a little bit lazy in this industry and thinking, you know, there's always students around. There's always someone who will want just to pick up a few hours here and there. You have to understand that, in this economic environment, yes, there are people who want work, but they want work on their terms. You have to start negotiating between what you want and what they want and what is needed in the middle, so that you can adjust. You can't just expect that university students between November and March are going to be available every day of the week and will pick up a shift as soon as you ring and say, oh, you've got a four hour shift and the same with kitchen hands. They want a minimum number of hours because they have to travel and they have to adjust and they might have

other jobs and they might be juggling two or three jobs, so they need to know where they're going to fit in. All of those things need to come into consideration. It's not just a matter of saying, I want bar staff, I need kitchen staff and letting the people flood in and fill the gaps. I'm going to stop talking now, get off my high horse!

Well, I agree that it has to start at the hiring stage. Let's put the hiring groups into sort of two categories - the people who have already worked in the hospitality industry and the people who are students or new to work. Let's look at the first group first. If you've got an applicant who's now applying for one of the jobs, whether it's bar staff, kitchen staff, etc. and they've been in the industry, then it's talking about what they've done but also what was the organization like and how they fitted in there. They need to think about that. This will get you to go into what they used to and what they liked and not liked. That will help you think would they fit in this culture? Otherwise that's still at the question stage, at the hiring stage, but even in that interaction, you're given an indication and information to say what your culture is like, what you look for in hospitality. Then yes, then once they've been hired, I think absolutely you have to have very clear position description and what are the key performance indicators and the probation period.

Now I hear what you're saying and it is very, very hard, but that's why it's tempting to just say, oh, they're going to come and go anyway. So I'll just keep going. That's not helping you or anyone basically. Whether we like it or not, the situation is we always have to train them in this type of environment, right? If we've got an amount to choose from and we can pick the top 10%, we've got a group who are looking for work, but we want to pick the one that best fit our culture. So you establish that before they come on board. Establish the cultural fit. The technical skill as I call it, whether it is the cooking preparation or whatever, that's either you've got experience or you're going to be trained on the job or qualifications. And yes, once you're in the organization, it's very, very important to then go into depth on the way we do things around here. With our customers, we do it this way, with our team this is how we interact. If we've got suggestions or things we're not comfortable about, where do we go to ask all of those things to help them succeed. So you do it to set them up to shine, not to fail.

By doing that, and then the technical, and having regular interaction and someone who's the manager/supervisor, whatever you've got in your system, is to keep them learning and on track. It's at that time, when you know that these people are going to be the best you can have them on both cultural fit and technical ability, accepting that, as you know, the industry is such that these are transients. They're going to go but get the best of them for that time and invest in them to do their best wherever they go next.

If during that period, there was a lot of lip service and all of that, yeah, yeah, yeah, and all of that, but they don't respect the customer even though that was a key indicator about your interaction, being on time, leaving and not having your smoke breaks when you're not supposed to, all of those sort of things that are part of how you do things, there may be other organizations that have different ways and values. Then you bring it to their attention and give them the opportunity to own what they did, how to get better, then that hasn't translated, then get rid of them. If they are in a probation period that will make them think, I am only here for six months anyway, I don't care, play the game, then yes, it's hard on you as an employer because you've got to bring someone sooner but I think firstly accepting the fact that this is how it is, the pool of availability is very, very small and that for you to retain them longer is for

you to get it right before your hire. Invest in that and that might save you a bit of time, of turnover of staff.

As you were talking I was wondering why we just assume that people are going to be transient in this industry. Yes, there are people who will only have availability to work for extended periods of time, if we use the university students as an example, because that's quite a bulk of what is used in this area, if we say that that's November to March period of time is when they have their most availability. It's not their only availability in a 12 month period, you know, they do have other times and if you train them right and if they feel part of your organization, they will want to pick up shifts where they can. They will tell you. Are we are we missing the point, in this industry particularly, of just assuming that they are transients and trying to work with that rather than taking a stand and being different in the industry by saying we'll train our people, we'll show them how it works here, we'll value them because they add value to the business and therefore they want to stay. They don't want to look for anywhere else, you know, when holiday time rolls around again, they'll be in touch and say, are you looking for staff again this year? I'm available to work five days a week, whatever else it is if they haven't worked in the interim period, but if you try to acknowledge them and instill some reciprocal loyalties, it will change the industry. It will only take one or two organizations to do it and suddenly the industry will be looking at itself and saying why do they get staff who stay and we don't? Let's have a look at what they're doing.

In addition to the group that is I was thinking, when you said at the beginning transients, I was thinking about the fact that people from overseas on working holiday and stuff like that, so that's a different category again.

On the students that have, you know, the part timers that have limited time to work, I think I agree with everything you said. What I would do to is, let's say you need three people, I'll go for six because you have six to mix and match them so that the ones that are maybe different, one is a new, one is in there, but the timing of availability is more. These are great because they're looking for learning, how to be in a workplace and they would be perfect. So therefore if you do invest the time in showing them how to be successful, they might, you know, finish their studies and go to become completely different than hospitality, that's fun, but they know how important it is to do teamwork, how important relying on one person, relying on others and the consequences, how to treat frontline customers and all that sort of stuff. So you've got so much to give and you will get so much more if you do it.

I'll use an example of when I had the lolly shop for a long time and it was very difficult for me to find staff because it was my business and my face was the face of it and people knew me because I was a local. So it was difficult for me to find replacements. I found one that I was happy with, trained her up and you know, did all of the things that needed to do. She was at uni at that stage. Rather than me look for other staff, I said to her, do you know anyone else who is like you, who would be prepared to share the shifts with you, because she was at uni, and she had times where she wasn't available. She found someone else and then between them, they found two others. I never had to worry about someone turning up for a shift because between them, they worked out who was going to work and they would just send me a text message and say so and so is working today and that was fine.

It's a matter of not thinking about the way we always do things, thinking about what's the best

solution for this business and for the needs that this business has.

I will just tell you, as an aside, that two of the people. the original one that worked with me, she was she was studying to be a dietitian at that stage, so we're always joking that she was working in the lollyshop to be a dietitian. But eventually she got that qualification and now she is a doctor and works in the public health system. The other one, one of the others that she brought in to work the shifts with me, is a lawyer now in Canberra. They look back fondly at their time at the lollyshop and it was a different sort of job for them, but both were students at the time so their availability was mixed with when they had to be at uni and do other things and they had lives outside of the lollyshop in uni as well. That was a wonderful solution for me in a very small pool of resources because it was a small town and I needed somebody local and I needed a certain demeanor but someone that I could trust with the business and the money. A lollyshop always sounds exotic and enjoyable

but there were, like any retail environment, there were people who stole, shoplifting , there was threats, there was anger management, there was all sorts of things that happened within that environment as well. So you've got to have someone who you can trust with your business but who understands what your business is and what you expect out of them.

I hope that we've covered some options there for you. It's not just a matter of saying okay you're not a right fit for the business because you don't know, because they don't know, what they're supposed to be doing other than the technical tasks that you've got them in for. Take some time be an industry leader in terms of changing the way this looks and you might be very pleasantly surprised with the outcome. That's it on that case study for today, I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn and this is Inside Exec.