

# The Practice of Employment Marketing

Finding and Retaining Quality Staff

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In May 2017, the Labor Department reported nearly six million job vacancies in the U.S. More than half of new job openings are in the hotel and restaurant business. That means the competition is fierce to find and retain qualified employees. In this tight labor market, employment issues have become a critical concern for school nutrition programs. However, even in challenging times, there are hiring tactics you can use to attract the best talent to your organization.

## Activate Employment Marketing

Yes, the market is tight, and good candidates are hard to find. But you don't have to hire someone simply because "they are breathing." Whenever you have an opening, it's time to accentuate the positive, and begin marketing to potential applicants.

- 1. Differentiate yourself from your competition.** As with any marketing campaign, you need to stress your strong points. Make it clear to every job applicant how they would benefit from working for you. Do this by sharing your unique story with them. Tell them about the good you do every day, highlighting how important the school nutrition program is to students' health and academic performance. Weave details such as these into your interviewing message.
- 2. Anticipate the question in the back of most candidates' minds: "Why should I work for you?"** Give candidates clear reasons for wanting to work for your organization. Before you start the interviewing process, sit down with your team and brainstorm on all the reasons someone might want to work for you. Think about why you took a job in school nutrition, and why you are still there. Ask your team to do the same. Then compile a list of benefits, and make them central to your marketing process. Remember, potential employees are interviewing you, at the same time you're interviewing them.
- 3. Emphasize the strengths of your team.** People work with people. No one works in a vacuum. So help your candidates to see why your team is the best one to be on. Tell them what is special about the people in your organization, and describe how everyone works together. Put the spotlight on people with unique talents. Perhaps you have a guest chef that trains staff in prep skills or creative recipes. Maybe someone else is an avid school gardener. You're there to sell the applicant on your department, so stress points that set team members apart. Also, let candidates know yours isn't the same old school nutrition program. Tell them they can be part of an exciting

change movement where you're eliminating stereotypes, busting myths, and building a winning reputation with your customers.



## 4. Let candidates know the good stuff doesn't stop there.

Hiring is one thing: retaining good employees is another. Successful organizations have a solid onboarding process in place to help new employees become part of the team from day one, including substitutes. During the interview, describe how you integrate new staff members into your culture. This can be very reassuring to an applicant.

In truth, the hiring process never ends. Openings can occur when you least expect them. That's why it's so important to be prepared at all times. Human resource professionals call it "developing your bench." As with any sports team, it pays to keep your eyes open for future talent. This will shorten your hiring time, and keep potential candidates in the pipeline at all times.

School nutrition can be fast-paced, and often challenging, but its rewards can be as great as its demands. So, get the word out, and market your program to potential candidates. Let them know why they should be working for you.



Kim Hofmann currently trains for the Institute of Child Nutrition, in addition to running her own business, Kim H Consulting, through which she offers live seminars and online training in foodservice management and cost control. Kim was a school foodservice director for 13 years, and spent six years as a sales representative for a major foodservice distributor.