

How to Find Great Employees – and Hang On to Them

Rudy Miick has been practicing what he preaches since at least 1978. That's when he founded Miick & Associates, a Boulder, Colorado-based consulting business focusing on successful startups and the performance improvement of restaurants, hotels and resort properties nationwide.

Miick's experience in the hospitality field began at age 15, and by 24 he was a partner in his first restaurant. He's co-authored four books on restaurant management and is a regular speaker at state and national association gatherings. Michigan Restaurateur picked up this grab bag of tips during Miick's seminar at the Michigan Restaurant & Lodging Show in October. They're tips, says Miick, that "are based on reality, not theory":

Start with yourself:

Ask yourself why you chose the restaurant business: Be honest. Once you know why you're there, what fires you up and what your vision is for the future, share these things with your team and the people you interview.

Hire people who share your values:

You must have a defined set of values in your restaurant. The first piece of having people join you by choice, rather than chance, is sharing your values with them.

Find new candidates from your existing team:

Give your servers, bartenders, counter people, etc. business cards where they can fill in their own names. Hand them out on the street: "Come check out our restaurant."

People hang out with people like themselves:

If you've got good team members, give them a cash incentive to bring in their friends -- say \$100 for someone that stays with you for six months. You'll save money, because turnover costs \$1,200 to \$2,000 per employee.

Invite good employees to visit your restaurant:

When you come across someone at another business whose service you like, give them your card and invite them to visit for a free dessert. Tell them you like the way they work, and you'd love to see their energy in your restaurant. This is subtle but effective.

Go beyond the usual "help wanted" sign:

Install a permanent, framed sign telling what your company is about, what your values are, and what you offer in team-building and opportunity. Then add, "If you're this kind of person, please come in and apply."

Use the radio:

Radio gives double bang for the buck, especially in a targeted market. Tell about your wonderful restaurant... "and oh, by the way, we're looking for great people."

Walk the talk:

Since 1965 we've taught kids to ask why, to say no, and today's kids don't simply do as they're told. But if they see you picking up stuff in the parking lot on your way in, they think, "Wow, if the owner will do that...." Lead by example.

Be flexible; fit their passion:

If you could hire a "C" player who can work four 8-hour shifts a week, or an "A+" player who can only work two, who would you hire? Don't settle for "C" by getting stuck in your schedule. Create a flexible schedule, and bring in the A+ players.

Example: Miick's Los Angeles restaurant welcomes the actors other employers shun as too flighty. "We say, 'You're an actor? Great! Your role is to be the best server you can be,'" says Miick. "I tell them I'm a restaurateur, and while I don't expect you to have my passion for the restaurant business, here's what I do expect: Support me, and I'll support you. If your agent calls, go -- but you are responsible for covering your shift. And they will cover. We went from a 400 percent turnover rate in L.A. to less than 20 percent." Whether it's skiing, sailing or golfing, how do you make your schedule fit their passion? Support it, and they'll support yours.

Have fun at work:

Miick has food or wine tastings on the floor, in the middle of a shift. "At 8:30 we pull the whole staff together, give them a half ounce of the wine of the night, taste it, smell it, swish it, pop it, spit it, do a big cheer and blow back out. It's crazy -- and the guests love it."