

Learning From Other Industries: Staffing Options

Part Time Solutions

Full-time diligence helps professionals and retailers utilize part-time help for their operations

By E. Michael Johnson, *Golf Shop Operations Magazine*

Retailers and golf professionals work in an environment of constant change.

Whether it be shuffling product off shelves to make room for new inventory or rearranging foursomes for the weekend scramble, seemingly there always is something to be done.

Besides the everyday hustle and bustle, there's the nuts-and-bolts work of hiring the right mix of people to run an efficient shop. Part of that process is weighing whether to hire full- or part-time employees.

Hiring a part-time, flexible workforce has advantages, not the least of which may be removing benefits, vacation and overtime from the compensation equation.

This often can amount to a savings of nearly 40 percent of a person's salary. It also gives employers a group of potential full-time employees who already have a working knowledge of the operation when a job opens. Conversely, too many part-timers can leave an employer with an unstable workforce that can self-destruct at any time.

Golf pros and retailers agree there are advantages and disadvantages to part-time help.

"We try to fill in around our base and foundation people with part-time help," says John Rang, owner of Bobick's Golf in Fort Wayne, Ind. "This is especially true during the peak and seasonal periods. Normally we turn to college students. This gives us the help we need during the peak times, and many of them return to work full-time during the summers or after they graduate. It's an ideal scenario."

Bill Reid, general manager of the TPC at Sawgrass in Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla., is more cautious toward part-time help. "It (the decision on whether or not to hire part-time help) changes from marketplace to marketplace and labor pool to labor pool. You have to determine if quality help of that kind is available. If it's not, you're better off to keep looking for other ways to fill the void." In the long-hours world of golf shops and retail stores, the prospect of employee burnout is real. Veteran shop owners have long realized part-time help and creative scheduling can be part of the solution.

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Ron Beck,
Crumpin-Fox Club

"You really have no choice but to use both full-time and part-time help," says Jim Kauffman, owner of Pro Golf Discount in Williamsville, N.Y.

"There are also some jobs where it's just not necessary to have a full-time person. You can't afford to pay a full-

time salary for part-time production.

"You don't want to have people standing around when nobody's there and you don't want to have customers standing around with no one to wait on them. It's a seven-day-a-week business in which your busiest times are nights and weekends. Part-timers are critical in that environment."

For many years, those who worked part-time faced the stigma of being labeled unworthy of full-time employment. Now, part-time work has become respectable. In fact, many part-time jobs often turn into auditions for full-time employment. "Two of our current full-timers started here part-time," notes Kauffman. "There's no reason not to promote a part-timer to full-time if they've shown they can do the job. It reduces hiring costs and reduces the risk in finding a good employee."

Of course, not all part-timers are employee-of-the-month candidates. "Part-timers are the people who can do the most damage," says Hank Plotkin, founder of The Plotkin Group, a Carlsbad, Calif. based international management consulting and training firm. "Statistics show that part-time employees steal more. They don't have things like tenure or pension plans to lose."

Plotkins says golf shops should be particularly selective when hiring part-time help. "They're not (often) trained in customer service," he says. "A pro says to himself, 'Well, they're not going to be here for long, why go through the effort to train them.' That's a bad mistake. Good customer service leads to money.

Look no further than Nordstrom."

But while part-timers may have less

of a personal stake in the operation, many do need the job - a fact not lost on employers. "Many part-timers work for different reasons," says Reid. "One of the first things you have to do is identify why that person is working and why they want to work for you. It makes a big difference in the way you manage them. We have one lady who loves to work between Labor Day and Memorial Day while her kids are in school. We have others who go to school and only want to work summers. It's important to find a combination that answers the following question: What's in it for you and what's in it for them? If you can answer that, your part-timer is likely to be very productive. If you can't answer that question, you'll be constantly turning over your part-time help. That's when problems occur."

One professional who has experienced few problems with those working less than a full schedule is Clayton Cole. The head professional at Cherry Hills C.C. in Englewood, Colo., oversees a golf and member services staff of 23 employees during the season, including three part-timers on his golf staff. Cole says the key to getting good part-time help lies in networking.

"The majority of my part-timers have been recommended to me by members, other professionals or come from the (PGA-affiliated) Mississippi State University (Professional Golf Management) intern program. I always make it a point to contact someone who knows something about the individual. You have to be as careful with part-timers as with full-timers, maybe more so. You might not get a good person every time, but it reduces the risk. The fact is that you need part-time help, so it's worth the effort to secure the best people available."

As with full-timers, it's not always a question of hiring the best person available, but the best person suited for the job. A clear job description is just as important for part-time help as it is for a first assistant. A frequent problem is a simple mismatch - a part-timer is brought in thinking he'll be working the floor and he ends up sweeping it instead. And while

Voltaire once said that "Work banishes three great evils: boredom, vice and poverty," disillusioned workers often choose to be bored and broke rather than work at a job in which they have little interest. And with no strong ties to the operation, they tend to pack it in sooner rather than later.

"We have six to eight part-time people working in our merchandising operation, and we let them know right up front what's expected of them," says Reid. "In return, we offer them strong scheduling flexibility. When done properly, (hiring part-time help) can be a win-win situation."

Ron Beck, head professional at Crumpin-Fox Club in Bernardston, Mass., also sees the value of content part-time help. "Part of keeping employees happy, part-timers included, is treating them with dignity and respect. Give them a situation they're happy in and they'll produce."

Unfortunately, the government may make professionals and retailers think twice before bringing on their typical complement of part-time hires. A January 1997 interpretation by the U.S. Supreme Court of Title VII of the

1964 Civil Rights Act quashed the common small-business practice of hiring part-timers to sidestep federal employment laws governing businesses with 15 or more employees. In essence, the court's ruling now requires a number of small businesses with part-time workers to comply with the full array of federal employment laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Family Medical Leave Act.

A cause for pause? Perhaps. But the practice of running a shop or retail store with a few full-time anchors aided by a supporting cast of free-floating buoys is certain to continue. Whether it be the eager college student or the energetic retiree looking to supplement Social Security and pension income, part-time help will continue to compose a healthy portion of the retail and golf shop workforce.

"Good part-time help is essential to running a quality retail operation," says Rang. "There's no getting around it."

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