

CONNECTED

VISUAL MEDIA ALLIANCE

FALL 2021



Employees are the Key to Small Business Success

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Visual Media Alliance is non-profit trade association serving Northern California printers and design agency small business owners. By providing events, education, discounts, advocacy, industry promotion and insurance programs, we help our 500 member firms become more successful and profitable.

ON THE COVER

The valuable and committed employees of Moquin Press.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Greetings VMA Members,

Over the past few months, I have been fortunate to tour several of your shops. At every visit, I have been impressed with the ability of VMA members to persevere through the challenges of running a business in 2021. Our members are truly a hardy and resilient bunch!

A common challenge I hear is the lack of available labor. Extended unemployment benefits, retirements, and exits to other industries, along with relocations from California to lower-cost parts of the country have made it harder to find the experienced employees we have always been able to count on.

In this issue of *Connected*, we take a deep dive into the No. 1 asset of every businesses: our employees. It's never been more critical for employers to create a positive environment to retain employees and create the conditions to attract new staff.

VMA is here to help. From employee benefit programs like health, vision, and dental to tools that help employers manage their employees like Mineral (formerly ThinkHR) HR platform, your association has your back. Sue Benavente, who runs our Job Center, can help you create job descriptions and get them posted to our online job portal as well as to the Indeed website.

Our Scholarships and the new Schools-to-Career program will raise awareness and help attract job-ready candidates to our industry. We will soon offer a new 401k retirement program so our employers can comply with next year's California mandate and compete with the big companies for talent.

Your employees are your secret sauce and the key to your business's success. And we are here to help. Please reach out to me anytime at ian@vma.bz.



Sincerely,

Ian Flynn

Ian Flynn
President, Visual Media Alliance

“Take good care of your employees, and they'll take good care of your customers, and the customers will come back.”

– J. Willard Marriott
Founder of Marriott Corporation



It's Open Enrollment Time

For most companies, now's the time of year to select your health insurance plans for the coming year. If you have your policies through VMA, your VMA account manager will be reaching out to you shortly.

For those without health insurance through VMA, now's a good time to check with us to see how you can benefit from being an association member. VMA has HMO and PPO options with the full suite of carriers to choose from and the ability to mix and match. **The rates are competitive, and you get many additional complimentary benefits included such as:**

- Ease – a benefits administration portal to make managing your employee benefits an ease.
- Labor posters – a free set of California labor posters for each year to help you stay compliant.
- A dedicated account manager committed to providing you with excellent customer service and who will be there when you need it.
- Knowledge that your premiums support the graphic arts industry, including lobbying efforts.

Plus, VMA also brokers supplemental benefits like dental, vision, life, and commercial insurance, so you can get all your insurance needs taken care of in one place.

Remember, providing good benefits is a great recruitment and retention tool.

Contact shannon@vma.bz for more information. Or go to: insurance.vma.bz/openenrollment.



Finding Local Talent Made Easier

We hear you that finding good talent is one of your greatest challenges. VMA's Job Center is an easy-to-use, local, and free service for all those looking for employees in the creative, web, marketing, and print businesses in Northern California.



With VMA's Job Center, you can:

- Search for a candidate and find experienced, full-time, part-time, entry level, or intern personnel in printing, design, marketing, and other related fields.
- Easily post job openings or send the job opening to VMA, and we'll take care of it for you.
- Get great exposure – VMA will post most openings on Indeed and on VMA's website.
- VMA will review applicant resumes to find the best possible candidates for you.

Check out: vma.bz/hr-support/job-center.

For questions or assistance on the program – including posting a job description, email sue@vma.bz.

Small Business Cyber Attacks are on the Rise – Cowbell to the Rescue

Cyber attacks are growing in both frequency and severity, and particularly targeting small businesses.

Industry experts estimate that cybersecurity incidents will cost businesses more than \$5 trillion within the next five years alone. The average cost of a cyber attack has exploded from \$34,000 to just under \$200,000 per single incident.¹

The average downtime a company experiences after a ransomware attack is 21 days.² The good news is that by using artificial intelligence we can now help balance exposure with appropriate coverage.

VMA Insurance Services specializes in helping print and creative agency businesses get covered with the right kind of cyber risk insurance. Get peace of mind from cyber risk for as low as \$400 per year for \$250,000 worth of coverage.³

Contact shannon@vma.bz or 415-710-0568 for more information.



1. Hiscox's 2019 Cyber Readiness Report. 2. Cowbell Cyber. 3. Amount varies based on specifics

VMA EVENTS

On September 23, many of you joined us for the 2021 VMA Golf Tournament & BBQ! The event was held at the beautiful Metropolitan Golf Links in Oakland. It was a wonderful opportunity for mixing and networking in-person for the first time in a long time.

The 9-hole loop course offered gentle undulation changes with just enough strategic bunkering and panoramic views of the bay. There was a driving range and a pro offering tips. It was an overall good time!

Thank you to our sponsors including BASYS, Bay Digital, Canon Solutions America, GMG Color, Hewlett-Packard, Lowest Price Print / Volume Press, Pitney Bowes, Printers 401, Spectrum Lithograph, Spicers Paper, VMA Insurance Services, VMA Supplemental Benefits, and ZypPages.

We're planning more virtual and in-person events. The popular Collective Conversations series will continue monthly. SalesCircle will be held virtually as a sales group for support, ideas, and networking with peers. We'll also have in-person networking events under the brand name ConnectUp, hosted at our printer members' fantastic locations. The events will be spread across our geographic footprint, making it easier for folks to attend locally. Visit vma.bz/networking-events.



Congratulations to the 1st place winners at the 2021 VMA Golf Tournament. From left to right: Tim Freeman, Spectrum Lithograph; Eric Dalton, GMG Color; Michael Would, Chromagraphics; and Eric Zirbel, HP shown with wine compliments from JP Graphics. View more images at [flickr.com/photos/visualmediaalliance/albums](https://www.flickr.com/photos/visualmediaalliance/albums).



BBQ dinner filled with fun, laughter, and prizes following the VMA Golf Tournament.



Attendees of the Sales Circle event at On Line Bindery



Attendees of the Sales Circle event at On Line Bindery



ConnectUp

ConnectUp is our new of networking events series. These will hopefully be primarily **in-person** events held at printer member locations around the Bay. We'll discuss sales, networking, referrals while making connections and referrals. Visit vma.bz/connectup.



Collective Conversations

We continue with the popular Collective Conversations group. This series is a **virtual** round table discussion with VMA members featuring different topics. We launched last May at the start of COVID and it has been well attended. Business topics have included "Small Business Recovery," "Health Insurance Q&A," "HR Legal Issues," "Managing Your Workforce," and "Marketing Tips." We've also had events focused on sales technology, cybersecurity, and more. You can see upcoming events at vma.bz/cc.



SalesCircle

Join your colleagues and fellow VMA members at a **virtual** industry referral networking group. Similar to ConnectUp, we'll discuss sales and referrals tips and ideas. Our second event had 17 attendees with lots of enthusiasm, connections, and referrals. We hope you come join us! Visit vma.bz/salescircle or contact shannon@vma.bz.

MEMBER NEWS

Stunning Pebble Beach “Rendezvous” Work By Andresen



When you're a global risk management company like Applied Underwriters, how do you reward your key partners and decision makers after a stellar year? With a trip to attend the world-famous AT&T Pebble Beach Pro-Am

Golf Tournament in California, of course. And if you're aiming to attract such busy people, you better make sure your “Save the Date” card and invitation are simply too eye-catching to miss.

Applied Underwriters' in-house designs along with freelancer Alex Egnor created a stunning design around the company's St. Bernard mascot, Goldie. Andresen took it a step further by printing these beautiful invitational sets. andresendigital.com

Lowest Price Print Acquires Volume Press



Lowest Price Print (LPP) acquired Volume Press, one of the biggest trade-only printers in West Sacramento.

With a historical focus on high-quality and customer-focused service, now that their business is growing, they are happy to provide new services of EDDM and mailing services, web press printing, and envelope presses to their customers. The ability to provide web press printing allows clients to access long runs of letterhead, laser prints, and long-run flyers. Envelope presses will allow customers to print hundreds of thousands of envelopes per day. lowestpriceprint.com

JP Graphics Harnesses the Sun

JP Graphics prints for a lot of interesting and unique companies which offer some cool and useful products and services. Now, they do it sustainably. As a certified green company, they feel solar is a key contributor to their success. Thanks to Cool Earth Solar, they now have a total of 160 kW of solar on the roof. jp-graphics.com

NEW MEMBERS

WORK BOX

Workbox

Workbox designs solid, intelligent websites that are powerful sales and marketing tools. They apply their 25 years of experience of working with sophisticated, cutting-edge tech companies to every site they build. They understand how real people use the web in their lives, and how real organizations manage their websites.

Eric Weidner
415-215-0444
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Recognition Systems

Recognition Systems was established in 1968 and markets under the Dot Works trade name. They are a graphic distributor and converter of ink jet and graphic media. Dot Works' western distribution center is in Fullerton, California, with a satellite distribution in Santa Rosa, California.

Todd Pasco
516-623-5000
todd@dotworks.com
dotworks.com



2MarketVisuals

With decades of combined experience in the field of printing and graphic design, 2Market Visuals set the standards for large format digital printing and display graphics. Their solutions consist of much more than just ink on paper – they produce solutions that WORK...by design.

Cathy Doss
559-625-5230
cathy@2marketvisuals.com
2marketvisuals.com

Resource Label Expands California Presence

Resource Label Group LLC is a full-service provider of pressure-sensitive label, shrink sleeve, and RFID/NFC technology for the packaging industry. In August, it acquired Milpitas, California-based Tek Label & Printing Inc. expanding its west coast presence and leading position in the label and packaging industry. Teklabel represents the twentieth acquisition for Resource Label and further expands its regional strength in the western US with seven locations to serve its diverse customer base. resourcecelabel.com



MBD Receives Prestigious Awards



MBD receives a gold Vertex award for 7-Select Loco Rollers, Packaged Goods

Marketing By Design (MBD) is a strategy, design, production, and project management agency. Their goal is to always deliver commercial and creative value to their clients. MBD recently received not one, but four Vertex Awards at the My Private Brand Design Summit. The Vertex is the prestigious awards of My Private Brand which is the leading resource for retailer-owned brand development, analysis, best practices, news, information, and jobs.

Congratulations to MBD Design! mbdesign.com



Get An HR Platform & Benefits Administration For **FREE**

It's time to make your life easier!

Health Insurance benefits for you and your employees is a given. It helps with recruitment & retention – the #1 issue most small business face! You might as well make your life easier while you do so.

VMA members, with health insurance through VMA, receive two **complimentary** time-saving Health Insurance-related online platforms:

Mineral™

HR & Compliance Portal

An HR solution right on your computer!

- A complete program for HR compliance, safety resources, Q&As, employee handbooks, 24/7 Live Support, and more.
- California mandated Sexual Harassment Prevention Training for your employees.

ease

Benefits Administration Portal

- An easy-to-use software offering simple employee benefits system.
- Perfect to make employee benefits quoting, enrollment and employee benefits easier.



**Get it all
for free!**

Contact shannon@vma.bz or 415-710-0568 today
and be sure to get enrolled during Open Enrollment!

OPEN ENROLLMENT ENDS DECEMBER 21

The Secret Sauce to Your Business: Employees

BY SONALI SHAH

“Everyone talks about building a relationship with your customer. I think you build one with your employees first.”

- Angela Ahrendts, Former Sr. VP of Apple



What's the secret sauce to business success? Of course, a great product or service, exciting brand, and differentiation matter. But similar to the quality of the ingredients in an award-winning sauce making the dish, employees are the key to a business's prosperity.

This is recognized by business leaders like Angela Ahrendts, former senior vice president of Apple, who said, "Everyone talks about building a relationship with your customer. I think you build one with your employees first." Or Doug Conant, former president and CEO of Campbell Soup Co. who stated, "To win in the marketplace, you must first win in the workplace."

The importance of employees is true for brand giants, but even more important for smaller businesses where a single employee impacts the daily operations and customer-interactions.

How Employees Contribute to an Organization's Success

They carry out your mission and vision.

One of the top reasons employees are important to an organization's success is that they are the ones who are directly responsible for carrying out your *raison d'être*. They are the boots on the ground.

Suppose you have a mission statement that places emphasis on providing outstanding customer service; no matter how much you believe in the mission, it will be the employees themselves who

will deliver this incredible customer service. For example, at First Impressions Printing in Hayward, there's only one phone number for the customer service staff, so callers always speak to an actual person versus reaching voice mail or a phone tree.

They are the lifeblood of the company.

In addition to carrying out your mission, your employees are the essence of your organization. Your employees run all levels of your company. If you do not value them, ultimately, they will not appreciate your or your company.

Employees drive revenue.

According to Mapovate, employees are also important to the success of an organization because they help drive revenue. When employees are treated properly and given the proper guidance and tools, they can help reduce costs while boosting sales and revenue.

They can influence your customers.

One of the top reasons employees are vital to your success as an organization is that they can influence customers. No matter what type of company you have, your customers are likely to value the views and opinions of your employees over all else. Therefore, if you have many dissatisfied employees, customers may develop a negative view of your company overall.

Recognize Employees Have Power

With all the ways employees affect business, it would be a mistake to either ignore or not recognize their force. The best strategy



would be to nurture and grow employee's abilities in favor of the company's best interest.

If we value our employees, they value the company. It's the Golden Rule: Treat others how you want to be treated. Simply, we must show employees we value them, and in turn, they will do their best for the company.

Here are some ways you can motivate employees:

Take advantage of everyone's strengths.

According to a recent Gallup survey, when an employer focuses mainly on strengths, they motivate employees to be engaged in their work. Focusing on employees' talents can boost your bottom line and their attitude. Employees who primarily use their strengths at work feel less stressed and physically and emotionally healthier. This strategy increases their productivity also supports positive engagement with clients and customers.

Keep a feedback loop open.

Creating an environment with open communication helps employees know what they need to do and where they stand. Having conversations with employees early on will help make resolution faster and keep employees from being confused. Likewise, praise for a good job can go a long way in motivating more of the same positive behavior.

This also gives employees room to comfortably and respectfully voice any thoughts or concerns. When you hear what's going well

and what might need to change, you have a better sense of how your business is running overall.

Lead by example.

According to Talent Manager and HR, actions speak louder than words. So, if you are attempting to build a company that champions great customer service, compassion, going above and beyond, etc., you need to exhibit these same traits to your employees.

Show them you value them.

Providing your employees with standard and extra benefits goes a long way in recruiting, motivating, and retaining employees. Offering health insurance and dental and vision tend to be must-haves in competitive markets. Many employers sweeten the pot with life insurance, disability, and more.

VMA brokers many of these benefits and can help you find the best fit of PPO or HMO and supplemental benefits that help your employees and your business. Contact Shannon Wolford at shannon@vma.bz for more information.

Through all of the ups and downs a business owner may face, employees remain one constant ingredient. Using these strategies will help you motivate your employees, and find the recipe for success.

Mission Possible:

How Moquin Press is Solving Staffing Challenges

BY REVA HARRIS

"It's impossible to find employees right now." Sound familiar? Like many other business owners, Bryan Moquin of Moquin Press has been facing a serious staffing crunch. And to make matters more difficult, it comes at a time when business is reaching record highs. Many of the Bay Area printer's customers are in the foodservice sector, and the company saw sales skyrocket during the pandemic. Its label division grew 1,000%, and its packaging sales increased by 200%. While the growth has been a blessing, Moquin needed a solution to its staffing shortage – and he needed it quickly.

Filling the Candidate Pipeline with Employee Referrals

Since traditional employee acquisition methods, such as job ads and walk-ins, haven't been working as effectively as they did in the past, Moquin is leaning into referrals to attract new candidates. Employees receive a generous bonus every time they make a referral that results in a hire. It's a tactic that's worth the investment. According to LinkedIn, it only takes 29 days to hire someone who

was referred, compared to 55 days for most other recruiting methods. Of all the employee sourcing methods, employee referrals provide the highest ROI.¹

And in Moquin Press's case, the referral strategy has made the company even more of a family business than it already was. The business was started in 1985 by Moquin's father, and six of his relatives work there today. Now that many employees have referred their family members, it's created a culture where people are actually more invested in their work and each other. "We have daughters working with their mothers and sons working with their fathers," says Moquin. "There's a sense of pride in a lot of them because they don't want to let down their family members."

Offering Employees Room to Grow

One of the perks that Moquin offers new employees is the chance to grow: "We're basically just grooming them from the bottom up. We start everybody off in our bindery doing packing or cutting. And then we're continuously giving them a path to be more successful within the



Moquin Press employee setting up a die.

company." The company outlines the skills required for each role, and what it will take for each employee to gain new levels of responsibility and be successful within the company.

Employees get the opportunity to learn on the job, and there's no limit to how far they can grow. Moquin says, "Our general manager started out sweeping our floors three years ago. He came from Brazil and took any job he could. And now he's running the company." It's a story they tell every potential candidate to show that Moquin is serious about employee development. While every employee may not have the same trajectory as the general manager, they are given opportunities to explore their interests. "At Moquin Press, you kind of make what you want to do," he explains. If a production employee wants to try their hand at marketing, for instance, there's no red tape in their way.

Employees are also incentivized to generate ideas. Moquin says, "We're constantly encouraging all of them to find better ways to do things. We basically put a bounty on improvement projects. If an employee can prove to us that their idea has a positive impact on the company, then we give them a bonus for that." That approach allows the company to grow in



Moquin Press display at an event

1. LinkedIn, 5 Reasons Why Employee Referrals Matter to Small to Mid-sized Businesses

“

Employees are the number one thing that makes us successful.

”

ways that are sometimes unexpected. When customers started asking for corrugated packages, which Moquin Press didn't typically offer, one of the sales representatives took it upon himself to get bids from outsourced corrugated packaging printers. After crunching the numbers, Moquin realized the company could start offering corrugated packaging to its customers at competitive rates, allowing them to expand into a new market.

Sealing the Deal with Culture and Benefits

Moquin recognizes that, “Employees are the number one thing that makes us successful. That's our greatest resource. Without them we're nothing.” It's one of the reasons why the company's benefits package is highly competitive. Healthcare coverage, which Moquin purchases from VMA, is covered at 100% for employees. For unskilled workers who are often used to bare-minimum coverage, that makes Moquin's package stand out. Outside of core benefits, the company's culture is centered around celebrating and cultivating employees. Employees enjoy monthly barbecues and team-building activities (pre-pandemic). And with many long-term staff members, 20th anniversary celebrations are common.

By sourcing candidates from referrals, offering competitive benefits, and giving employees room to grow, Moquin Press is tackling the “impossible” staffing challenge head-on. To continue its success, the leadership team's mindset is constantly becoming more employee centric: “They're going to tell us what they want to do. And if we're standing behind them, they're going to stand behind us. If we take care of them, they're going to take care of us.”



Collection of Moquin Press prints and packaging.

What Small Business Can Teach Us in 2021

BY DOUGLAS KELLY, JD

Based on responses from more than 2,200 professionals in Mineral's (formerly ThinkHR) October 2020 survey, there's a bigger story at play than just "it was a challenging year." Small businesses teach us that responding to employee concerns, prioritizing people over profits, and dealing with compliance through collaboration are vital to braving the ever-changing role of human resources in 2021 and beyond.

Respond to Employee Concerns

Outside events affect the modern workplace. They can change individual views, group attitudes, or the way an organization does business. Racial injustice, election drama, and of course, the pandemic affected small businesses in these ways. Many employers did something in response.

For example, practically all employers took "material steps" to address COVID-19 in the workplace (99%). Outside of the pandemic, 47% addressed harassment and discrimination, 39% addressed diversity, equity, and inclusion, and 38% addressed mental health. The more employees an organization had, the more likely they were to address these issues — showing that employee concerns were a driver for employer action.

Prioritize People Over Profits

It is often said that employees are an organization's greatest asset. This proved to be especially true last year. Despite multiple threats to their business in 2020, employers actively prioritized their employees.

For example, employers ranked "employee wellbeing" as their number one priority as a result of the pandemic. The top reason for offering employee benefits was to "support employees." In contrast, some of the lowest-ranked answers from these two questions were to meet legal requirements, reduce costs, and terminate employees.

Small businesses largely looked beyond headcounts and figures and focused on what their employees needed most from them.



Collaborate to Be in Compliance

Laws, regulations, and guidance challenge employers because they take time and expertise to track, analyze, and apply to their workplaces. Compliance in 2020 was exceptionally tough for small businesses given policy responses to the pandemic.

In fact, when asked which human resources and compliance issues were most challenging, employers ranked changes in federal, state, and local laws at the top. But employers are adapting. When asked where respondents first turn to get answers to HR questions, most went to external experts such as a law firm or an HR consultant (73%). A sliver of respondents used informal sources, such as Google (12%).

Feeling the increasing complexity of human resources, small business worked with others to stay ahead of the curve.

We do not know what challenges lie ahead. But small businesses teach us that resilience, responsiveness, and humanity will be necessary to succeed in the ever-changing role of human resources.

VMA helps our members with the critical responsibility of employee management. VMA members get complimentary access to Mineral (formerly ThinkHR), an online HR & compliance portal.

This article originally appeared on Mineral's blog and is adapted with permission.

Mineral's human resources and compliance online platform. The portal is filled with helpful resources from more articles, an employee handbook builder, HR FAQs, and access to live HR support. Contact jessica@vma.bz for more information and your login information.



How to Improve Your Job Postings

BY MARISA STOLL, SPHR

A job posting is often the first impression a prospective job applicant has with your organization. It's essential for that impression to be an informative one. Your job postings should convey why someone would want to work for your company, what distinguishes your workplace from others, what's exciting about your mission and vision, what you have to offer, and what the job is and requires. Here are a few ways to get better results from your job postings:

Highlight the Company's Strengths

Part of the purpose of a job posting is to sell your organization to prospective employees. It's a sales pitch that conveys your culture and brand. Be sure to include both traditional benefits (e.g., insurance offerings, retirement plan) as well as less common, more exciting perks (unlimited PTO, remote work options, product discounts, etc.). It would help if you mention company awards, notable achievements, and career development opportunities.

List Minimum Requirements and Essential Functions of the Job

You can also include the full job description if you have room for it. The requirements and functions you mention should be accurate and clear. You don't want to scare away great prospects with unnecessary requirements, but you also don't want a lot of unqualified people applying for the job.

Include the Pay Range

Posting the pay range of the job will get you 30% more applicants. It will also save you and potential applicants a significant amount of time by allowing them to self-select out of the running if the range is too low for their needs or if it clearly indicates that you are looking for a more experienced employee. It will also promote transparency and help create a more equitable workplace, but it's not a requirement.

Review Past Results

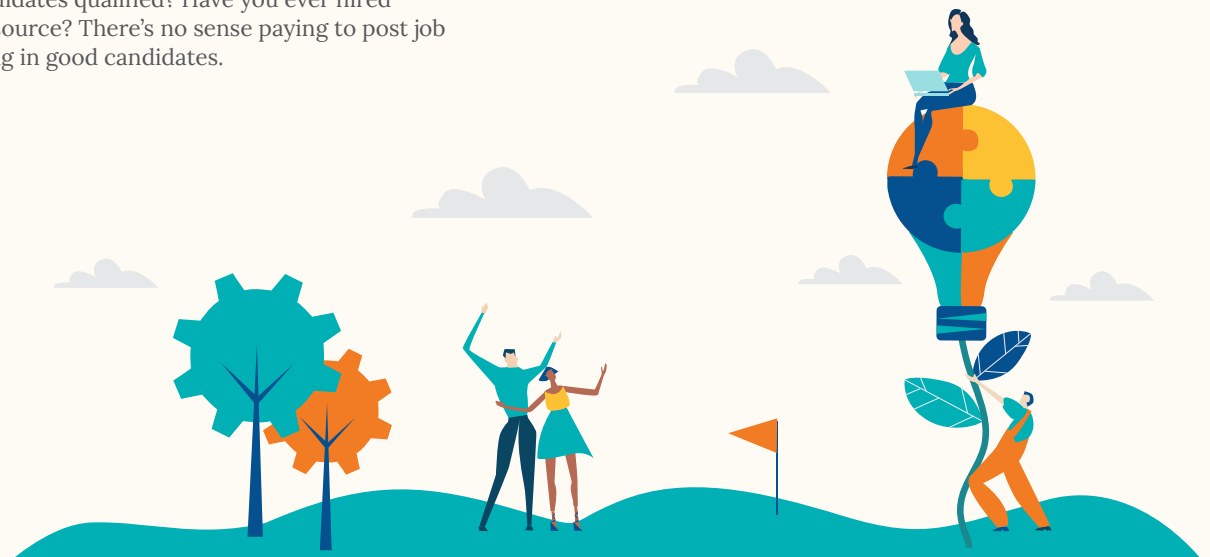
Analyze the results of previous job posting locations, especially if you paid for them. Consider the upfront fee and whether you received a good number of applications specifically from that source. Were the candidates qualified? Have you ever hired candidates from this source? There's no sense paying to post job ads that aren't bringing in good candidates.

Consider alternatives to where you've posted in the past.

Here are a few options:

- **Overlooked talent pools** (e.g., websites geared toward specific populations or groups) — these can be beneficial for increasing diversity in your workplace.
- **VMA's Job Center** — an easy-to-use, local and free service for all those looking for talent in creative, web, marketing, and print businesses in Northern California. It's easy to post job openings or send the job opening to VMA, and we'll take care of it for you. We'll also increase your exposure by posting the job on Indeed for you. VMA will review applicant resumes to find the best possible candidates for you. For questions or assistance on the program (including posting job openings or resumes), email sue@vma.bz.
- **Community events and job fairs in your area** — attending these events and answering questions about your company and your open positions can help weed out those who may not be a good fit or might not be happy in the role.
- **Local schools** — many colleges guarantee a certain job placement rate and have an entire department to help their students become employees in the industry of their education. Often, the coordinators of these programs will come to you for jobs, which is another direct talent pipeline. Reach out to your local community colleges or universities and talk with them about any students they might have who would fit your job description needs. They often also have an internal communication system that can get your job posting in front of many students (or even alumni) in a hurry.
- **Previous applicants** — even those you interviewed who might have been a second or third choice. You already know they're interested in your company, and you may have already met them face-to-face. Even if it's been half a year since they applied, reach out. What's the worst that can happen?

This article originally appeared on Mineral's blog and is adapted with permission.



ASK THE EXPERTS



EMPLOYEES ARE A REFLECTION OF YOUR BUSINESS

BARBARA STEPHENSON, CHIEF EXPERIENCE OFFICER

When you're a small business, every relationship counts. Ask any owner or manager who they would say is most important to their business, and nine out of 10 say their clients are at the top of that list. Seems reasonable since clients pay the bills, and the company wouldn't exist without them, right? Wrong. Businesses should be putting their employees at the top because by putting employees first, employees will put customers first.

To achieve this, an employee should generally feel fulfilled in their day-to-day responsibilities. If staff are generally unhappy, it will show and spread across every coworker interaction and echo down to clients and vendors. There are multiple business costs if you don't monitor and care about employee welfare. Keeping employees happy means clients are more satisfied, longer project life cycles, and increased opportunities for valuable new business references.

Satisfied clients are superior to client attrition, which results in constantly looking for new work, hitting the pavement, and networking, not to mention paying exorbitant costs for marketing or dealing with complaints or a bad reputation. A damaged culture means HR costs dealing with employee complaints and maintaining a revolving door of new hires, particularly in this tight labor market. It means constantly having to do succession planning and training stunts scalability, long-term growth, and revenue potential.

Good people management prioritizes the purposeful intent of providing employees with a sense of worth. Executing it takes social skills, emotional maturity, and hard work. This doesn't necessarily mean lavish spending. It means treating them like you want to be treated.

A good manager is one who trusts and gives employees the freedom to do their best, who treats people as valuable, who pays a living wage and good benefits, and who truly cares about the personal welfare of their employees. People inherently know if you care and respect them and their work will reflect it.

Employees are a reflection and therefore an extension of you and your business. Explaining to people why they should take care of other people seems like a no-brainer to me. It's a matter of ethics, basic kindness, respect, and core human values. It doesn't matter what size your company is — every employee counts.

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HAPPIER EMPLOYEES MAKE FOR HAPPIER EVERYBODY

JENNIFER J. WIEGLEY, ATTORNEY

It's easy to get caught up in the demands of running a business. Making payroll, complying with ever-changing federal, state, and local laws, dealing with customers, handling unexpected disruptions — the list goes on. Amidst the chaos, it's even easier to lose sight of what keeps your business on track and thriving. And the single most valuable assets your business has, the ones that are easy to overlook but you can't function without, are your strongest employees.

These are the employees with some combination of the following: vast knowledge or experience in your industry, great instincts, common sense, strong sense of personal and business ethics, enjoyable personality, etc. Maybe they know what you need before you do, or they never bring you a problem without offering a smart solution, or they have a knack with difficult customers or coworkers. Maybe they make your workday more enjoyable, or you have total peace of mind whenever you leave them in charge of something. Whatever they offer, you can't imagine your workplace without them.

A great employee makes your job easier and allows you to focus elsewhere, which all too often can turn into taking them for granted. Think about how much more energy and attention you devote to problem employees than superstars, simply because the squeaky wheel tends to get the grease. You love your key employees because you don't have to lie awake at night thinking about them.

But focusing on employee retention can be one of the most important preventative business decisions you make. Once a valuable employee has decided to leave, it's usually too late to change their mind, so your best bet is making sure they never want to leave. You should check in often with your top performers to let them know you appreciate them. You can do this in any way you think they would like: a gift card to a coffee shop, an extra hour of PTO, some perk unique to your business, or even simple positive feedback. Your top performers may not know how much you value them and making sure they understand that will go a long way toward keeping them around.

Check-in to see if anything might not be going so well from their perspective. Find out if they're having problems they didn't want to trouble you with or didn't know how to bring up. By keeping communications frequent and open, you can stay in front of any issues that might drive your best folks away.

As humans and business owners, we tend to overlook what's going right in favor of what's going wrong. But a little time and consideration for the key players on your payroll will help things go more right than wrong in the future.

Jenny Wiegley is an employment attorney providing employment law advice to our members. She has 12 years of experience in drafting or revising contracts, sales plans, employee handbooks, advising on risky terminations, defending class-action lawsuits, and conducting confidential workplace investigations. Jenny offers up to 20 minutes to each VMA member to provide free advice. Contact Jenny at jenny@welcounsel.com or 415-634-7472.

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