How to Write More Powerful “Help Wanted” Ads

The goal of any sound employee recruiting effort is to attract a pool of applicants which will include at least several highly qualified people. Historically, turf managers have used employee referrals and word of mouth as other recruiting methods fail to generate enough applicants. Employers often resort to writing help wanted ads and placing them in a local newspaper to help attract job applicants.

In today’s labor market, it’s important to sell your position. Aggressive marketing of open positions can pay off handsomely if done carefully.

However, it is not unusual to pick up a local newspaper and find an ad that reads, “Landscape worker wanted, call 333-4444.” This approach is hardly one which sells the position or provides the applicant with enough information to make a decision about whether to apply. In a perspective applicant’s mind, it doesn’t create an appealing image of the job they may be applying for.

To recruit the best applicants, a want ad must sell the position and provide information important to the applicant. A little time and creativity will go a long way toward improving the quality and attractiveness of your ad.

Recruitment advertising has many advantages: it can focus on the positive aspects of the business; it can create interest among people who otherwise would not be contemplating a job change and it can help overcome the effects of some other employers recruiting efforts.

A good “help wanted” ad is not a panacea. It won’t make poor working conditions or a deserved bad reputation of an employer disappear. There are no guarantees of how many applicants will respond or how qualified they will be.

To help ensure success, write and place the ad carefully. The ad-writing checklist on this page provides a step-by-step approach. Using this checklist in preparation to writing an ad will help stimulate your thinking and creativity and improve your ability to write an ad that will sell both the business and the job.

The objective of writing effective help wanted ads that sell the positions is to generate the best pool of applicants possible. Extra time spent in this process can have a big payoff in terms of future performance and reduced turnover.

The following checklist is a guide for preparing an effective “help wanted” ad. Respond to the following points regarding the vacant position when writing a balanced, attractive ad. Also refer to the job description if one has been developed.

Ad Writing Checklist

1. Give the job title, if appropriate. Examples include landscape crew managers, assistant golf course superintendent, lawn maintenance technician, and so on. Note: job titles are not required; use them only if they are helpful.

2. List as many positive things about your business as you can. The ad not only should sell the job, it should promote your business. Example phrases may include growing family business, line of new equipment, modern facilities, progressive practices, fourth-generation business and so on.

3. Describe the job. The ad should specifically describe the work to be done. Examples: Lawn mower operation, tree and shrub pruning, tree and shrub installation, turf maintenance, pest control and so on.

4. List as many positive working conditions as you can. Attractive working conditions can make a big difference to potential employees. Examples: flexible hours, opportunity to work independently, use of modern equipment, opportunity to work with a committed successful team, opportunity to learn and grow with the business and so on.

5. Provide information on wages and benefits if appropriate. Highlight parts of the wage and benefit package that you feel are particularly attractive. Examples include: seasonal bonus, medical insurance, retirement plan and use of business vehicle. Use phrases such as attractive benefits and competitive wages, for example.

6. Indicate how to apply. A manager who would prefer to screen applicants over the phone may wish to provide a phone number. Another option is to direct recruits to come by and fill out an application during business hours or have applicants apply to a blind post office box.

Here is an example of an ad which considers the steps in the ad-writing checklist and helps to sell the position to the best advantage.

Golf Course Maintenance Position: Historic, local country club seeks individual for general golf course maintenance. Duties include mowing, trimming, raking sand traps and other similar responsibilities. Competitive wages, 50 hours per week, overtime pay. Work with a modern line of well-maintained equipment. Fill out application at Successful Valley Country Club, 123 Country Club Drive, Successful Valley, N.Y. 54321

The ad clearly sells the position and makes it clear to applicants what the requirements are

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and the type of employer to which they are applying. It costs more to place a longer, more descriptive ad, but it is worth the investment when top quality applicants are attracted to the job.

Creativity is also important. Consider the following ad written by a golf course superintendent in South Carolina.

Shortstop needed for Springdale Country Club Softball Team: Looking for motivated team player who likes outdoor work. Requires golf course maintenance work during non-game days. No previous softball experience necessary. Call for more info 704-235-8451.

This ad is unique, attention getting and sends the message that “this is a fun place to work.”

Proper ad placement is the next step. The ad should be advertised for a length of time and in the appropriate local papers that will reasonably cover the appropriate labor market.

For high-paid, high-skilled positions, it may pay to do a regional or national search in regional or national magazines and publications.

Be prepared to screen inquiries or applications at your convenience and at times that do not disrupt your work. Use of application forms and clear statements of the minimum job qualifications in the ad can help keep screening time to a minimum.

Some employers also have found that screening time is reduced by using a blind post office box instead of having applicants inquire directly and interrupting them and employees as they are working. With this approach, you may end up with fewer, but better, applicants.

Thomas R. Maloney
Cornell University Turfgrass Team

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334 Plant Science Building, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853
(607) 255-7850

Creativity is important for an effective help wanted ad. Here’s a good example:

Shortstop needed for Springdale Country Club Softball Team: Looking for motivated team player who likes outdoor work. Requires golf course maintenance work during non-game days. No previous softball experience necessary. Call for more info 704-235-8451.