

Never too small to become a top employer...

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Becoming an employer of choice is not only for large companies and corporations, nor is it as unattainable as you might think. It does matter! Let's start with why...



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If people are at the heart of your business, you want to employ the best you can possibly afford. Excellent employees tend to choose large companies because they offer good pay and benefits, and because they're seen as more sustainable than small businesses.

But a small business that has earned a 'Top Employer' label is a different proposition entirely. This is exactly the sort of detail that attracts smart candidates who recognise an opportunity for growth when they see one. Attracting the right candidate is half the battle won and can accelerate a small business' growth.

How do you become an employer of choice? It's all about creating a culture and work environment that people want to be part of. Here are some ideas.

- Start by studying companies that have achieved top employer status, no matter what size they are. What are the qualities that employees judged most important about them, and why? If you can adapt them on a smaller scale, you're on the path to emulating their success.
- Money is often tight in small businesses, but money is not always the main motivator of top employees. Be creative in identifying attractive benefits and tailor them for different employees. Work/life balance is a scarce commodity these days and it's hugely important to many employees. Time is often as precious as money so be flexible about holidays and hours spent in the office vs. working from home. But when you're offering unusual benefits like time off or working from home, make sure that your expectations are clear so that the work gets done! Another great benefit for

part-time students is paid study leave.

- Speaking of studying, for employees who want to study further, financial support in lieu of a higher salary is an attractive benefit. This is an especially good benefit for young first-timers, particularly if you reward them with greater responsibility and financial benefits when they pass.
- Being transparent creates dedication. It's important for staff to share in your vision, to feel part of your growth and success, and to feel heard. Not all large employers can provide this, but you can.
- Being a small business has the benefit of creating growth opportunities for employees by exposing them to more. Setting up regular feedback and opportunities to look at growth paths that complement the growth of your business will inspire loyalty and retention. Top employees are attracted by knowing that they have a bright future with you.
- Provide bread or fruit at the end of the month. We all know what is like when you get to the end of the month. Providing a little extra at the end of the month like a bowl of fruit or a couple of loaves of bread can also put you ahead of the pack.
- You may not be able to provide a canteen but how about offering employees relatively inexpensive lunches on a regular basis, or a monthly splash-out on pizza? Tie this in with celebrating successes and sharing the vision and goals.
- It's also important to have fun together. People feel they matter when you do something as simple as taking them out for drinks and snacks on occasional Friday nights (and paying to get them home safely) or closing the office for a day of team-building.
- Recognise the achievements of your employees. It's easy to make people feel special! Send a thank you email – feedback is so important, and people love to feel valued.
- Celebrate birthdays. Decorate the employee's chair with a couple of balloons, give them a small gift, serve cake, and organise a card signed by everyone even if that only amounts to three people. Send a cake home with a young first-timer on their birthday – they'll be so proud for their families to see how you value them.
- Not everything needs to cost money. Set up a lunch time to watch a TED talk and create a discussion once a month to encourage learning and development.
- As you grow and make more money, be sure to share the spoils by rewarding your loyal employees financially.

We're sure that if you think about it, you'll come up with more ideas that are appropriate for your business. It's worth spending time on this because attracting top employees is not the only advantage of achieving 'Top Employer' status. It will enhance your reputation, give you a competitive edge, enable excellent branding, and achieve great publicity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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