

# How to hire

## superstars



Imogen Edmunds' Top 10 tips for hiring high-performing staff at a time when everyone is competing to attract the small number of potential candidates actively looking for work

**D**emand for childcare places may be high, and about to get higher, but access to quality candidates to fill early years positions is a challenge for many settings. After all, you don't just want anyone working in your setting - you want superstars who get what it is you are about and wake up every day determined to make a difference in a child's life.

Our work within the profession shows us that, for some settings, high labour turnover is making the shortage of applicants a real problem. We understand that some providers are reporting that they have staff prepared to move from setting to setting for as little as 10p an hour more! High labour turnover causes demotivation

amongst the team, impacts on the quality of practice, confuses the children and can lead to parents challenging management about staffing.

For other settings, labour turnover is low, perhaps too low, and recruitment is a rare opportunity. When it is necessary to hire, the challenge is to find individuals who will fit in with a close, highly stable, and established team.

When hiring superstars there are a few things you may wish to consider that don't need to blow the budget:

### 1. Do I have to hire?

Big question this one, and one you should definitely ask. Just because someone has resigned, do you have

to hire their replacement? One option could be to reshuffle the setting and move someone else into the vacant position, thus creating a vacancy lower down that you may find easier to fill. Promoting from within as part of a talent management strategy will always be judged favourably by the existing workforce. Perhaps engaging bank staff

could be the alternative to expensive agency labour to address your short-term need.

### 2. Does it have to be these hours, on these days?

Your superstars maybe have restrictions on the hours they are available to work. Your vacancy may be tricky to fill because of the hours or days that the previous post-holder worked. If you are open to part-time staff and job-shares, say so, for there is a shortage of part-time vacancies in the UK, and the most able candidates may be prepared to leave a full-time job if your offer of part-time hours suited them better. You may also attract women returners back into industry after a career break.

### 3. Does the job description need updating?

Your job descriptions are your best friends; look after them and they will look after you! When someone leaves a job, that's the time to update the job description. Remember your superstars may not have the qualifications you want yet, but will have the attitude and personality necessary to go and complete them. If you hire the right candidate with the right attitude, the skills can come later. In the words of Peter Schutz, management guru and the former CEO of Porsche: "Hire character, train skill."



#### 4. Where do these people hang out?

When recruiting your superstars, you need to think about where your candidates will be hanging out when they see the vacancy. Do you have people coming through your door who may know people who would be great for your setting? Your parents could spread news of the opportunities to join your team.

Another source of superstars is your current workforce. If you know where they live in relation to your setting, there is a good chance that future hires will live in the same area. Plot the addresses on a map with pins and see whether there are any hot spots. If so, you then simply identify the local places and media to advertise your vacancies.

#### 5. Will my superstar be on social media?

On 27 August 2015, Facebook had 1 billion daily users. This means one in seven of the world's population used Facebook on that day! Your superstar will probably have a presence on social media, whether they are a regular or occasional user.

So, how can you make use of social media? There are, in fact, many ways in which childcare employers have used it to spread the word about their vacancies. Some use Microsoft PowerPoint or canva.com to produce a decent advertising poster in portrait format, which you can save to your computer as a jpg or png file. Other settings have good results from posting to Facebook groups such as Vacancies in Early Years.

Remember one of the reasons people like using social media is that it lets you raise a small hand. Joining a group on social media or searching the internet is a relatively small step and allows the potential candidate to remain private about their intentions.

#### 6. Should I use free jobs boards?

In all likelihood your superstar will have access to the internet, and sites like indeed.com and jobsearch.direct.gov.uk allow you to post your vacancies for free. Make sure you use a good job title throughout the advert that will be

*'...some providers are reporting that they have staff prepared to move from setting to setting for as little as 10p an hour more!'*

searchable by candidates to improve search engine optimisation (SEO).

#### 7. Should I get a PVC banner?

Your superstar candidate may pass your setting on their commute. Make it easy to see that you are hiring: a simple PVC banner fixed to a wall or fence is often used to advertise that you are hiring and can be spotted by those who pass you.

#### 8. Could you put a vacancies page on your website?

Don't miss out on superstar candidates who look at your website. Even if you have no current vacancies, under the heading 'Work with Us', you can describe the characteristics you look for in your ideal candidates and make it clear that you are always looking for great practitioners.

A superstar will be reading closely what you say, and assessing how genuine they feel you are. If they are happy with someone else, they won't want to risk joining a setting that may not be what it appears. The superstar will be looking for consistent messages between social media, your web page and how people talk about you.



Make applying super easy

#### 9. Could you take a small advert in the paper and direct your candidates to your website?

Use adverts in the paper to drive traffic to your website where they can find the application form and information pack. Make sure you have a deadline for the vacancy as newspapers have a habit of hanging around. Perhaps, get some great PR in the paper at the same time. If your setting has been involved in any charity fundraising, or opened a new garden for example, good-news stories like these with great photographs are sought by journalists to fill their local papers.

#### 10. Could you introduce a staff referral scheme?

Could you redirect some of your recruitment budget and use it to incentivise your staff to refer people they know to fill your vacancies? Schemes work best when any reward is split into two payments. Give 50 per cent when someone starts and the balance at the end of the probationary period. In my experience, your best performing staff will know other superstars and won't refer people who they know will not be successful as it will reflect poorly on them. ■

- Following the birth of her son, James, in 2004, Imogen launched Redwing Solutions to provide HR consultancy to SMEs in the West Midlands. Eleven years later, she is well known for her HR for early years across the UK. Her book, *Hiring Superstars for your Early Years Setting* will be published in early 2016 and will be available on Amazon.

**E:** imogen.edmunds@redwing-solutions.co.uk **W:** redwing-solutions.co.uk  
**Facebook:** facebook.com/hrforearlyyears