

Busy, Period

Tackle your growth spurt with a how-to on seasonal staffing

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If your business bursts to life come summertime, avoid the scramble to fill and manage the gaps in your staffing by looking ahead. If you're a florist or contractor, no doubt you'll be anticipating a busy season, but when it comes to that extra staffing required, are you best equipped to hire, retain and manage them? Have a look at a few key things to think about...

Research for legal ease

Laws and regulations covering seasonal staff differ from province to province, and they can be tricky to navigate. But doing your due diligence up front can save you headaches down the road. "A lot of employers read the BC Employment Standards Act [or similar legislation depending on the province or territory] and think that's the end of their legal obligations," says attorney Martin Sheard of Vancouver employment law firm Tevlin Gleadle Curtis. "That's wrong. It's just the beginning, as it only sets the minimums of what employees are entitled to. [Many] employers are shocked to learn how much more a person is entitled to. Others face untenable liability for having fired someone without notice, or failed to recognize alcoholism as a disability, for example."

Put it on paper

Sheard points out: "Goods or services exchanged for money equals a contract in Canada. Every person who's employed has a contract, and it doesn't need to be in writing." He does however recommend employers draw up a contract laying out specifics of the job, such as pay, hours, title, and perhaps most important, term and termination. "And it must comply with the minimums set out in the ESA (or provincial equivalent). It can be more generous but it cannot be less generous." A key thing to remember: "Employers are obligated to pay overtime, regardless of whether their employees are short term or long term, unless they fall into certain exemptions under the regulations" says Sheard.

Tackle taxing tasks

Small business employers of seasonal staff are also required to register temporary employees with Canada Revenue Agency for tax purposes. Catherine Connelly, Associate Professor of Human Resources and Management at McMaster University's DeGroote School of Business, says, "You have to declare your payroll taxes, number of staff, etc. There are certain deductions you have to make, T-4 slips to issue. The easiest way to do that is to contract it out to a payroll service."

Take a look back

Although it isn't mandatory in most cases, Sheard says conducting a background or police check on a new hire can be reassuring, particularly if you're running a daycare or summer camp. If your business requires your staff to have access to your client's homes, use your diligence as a selling point of your services.

Speak to an expert

Sheard acknowledges employment law can be complicated. "It's worth picking up the phone and talking to a guy like me. At the very least, read through [your province's employment regulations]. And well-written termination provisions are your friend."



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