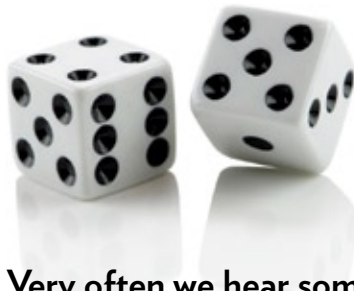


# Hiring the Best: No Time for Dice



As beverage consultants, we go out a lot. Very often we hear something like, “The staff here is great. These guys got really lucky.” Lucky?

Nope. Hiring, building, and maintaining a talented and well-rounded staff has nothing to do with rolling dice. It’s a skill, developed through experience. Here are our thoughts on hiring a first-class staff:

## INTERVIEW INSIGHTS

- 1 **Create an A, B, and C list of candidates:** A—your must-sees, B—these meet some but not all of your requirements, and C—these are the last-resort backups.
- 2 **Demand at least three professional references** along with a resume submission (not “furnished upon request”), and put any that don’t provide in your C file (but not in the circular file—that’s illegal).
- 3 **Check references!** Also call the establishments on an applicant’s resume and speak to a manager or owner who is not listed as a reference. A “former” GM tagged as a contact can often turn out to be a best friend or a second cousin.
- 4 **Look closely at telltale resume items.** A) Time at each location: Look for a bare minimum of six months. Conversely, a person who has been at the same location for ten years might be too set in his or her ways. B) Closed establishments: It’s easy for someone to say he or she worked somewhere when there’s no way to confirm. C) Holes and jumps: Gaps of several months in between jobs is generally not a positive sign. A resume showing the applicant has worked in 15 cities around the world probably means that person is unlikely to stick around very long.

**First and foremost, know what it is you seek.** Whether it’s a floor manager, a line cook, or a bartender, do you need a person with significant expertise or someone who can be tailor-trained to your program? Are you looking for creative wonder or someone with a keen eye for details? A lion or a lamb?

**Look to promote from within—always.** Today’s rock-star busboy just might be next month’s top-grossing captain. Internal hiring establishes loyalty and fosters the notion that there is always room for advancement—and it cuts out advertising and the time for the interview process.

**Use your contacts.** Wine vendors, produce suppliers, PR reps, concierges, even regular customers will generally have an idea as to what’s going on around town and who has left where. But remember, poaching is a big-time no-no.

**Prepare for the arduous, time-consuming interview process.** Minimize stress by learning to read a resume and establishing criteria based on amount of experience, formal training, types of previous employers, awards and accolades, and so forth.

**Spend a minimum of 45 minutes to an hour for a first interview.** Always be prepared with a list of questions. Steer the conversation, and move to the next question when you’re satisfied with an answer, but keep the dialogue lighthearted to draw out the interviewee’s personality. You must make sure you can work with the job contender.

**Always trust your gut instinct, especially when considering someone with very little practical experience.** At the same time, remember the wisdom of the group as well. Management hires should not be made by one person or from the initial interview. Schedule a second and even third interview a few days apart. See the candidate on different days and in different moods.

**Once you have them, keep them.** Be good to your staff, and respect them. If you treat your staff right, they’ll recommend other good people.

Every server, dishwasher, and sommelier in town knows the great places to work, and most also know a place or two that roll the dice when hiring. If you aspire to the former, you won’t have to rely on employment games of chance.

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