

On Hiring an Office Manager

“At what point does a gym club typically need to hire an office manager?”

To answer that question, I need to explain a rule that I call the 500/3 Decentralization Rule. When a new, small gym club has few employees and an owner fresh with unbounded energy, a hub and spoke organizational strategy — where YOU are the hub and your employees are the spokes — is most commonly used. A hub and spoke strategy can be very effective for a while. At some point, however, assuming the gym club seeks to grow, certain responsibilities, including those an office manager would typically hold, must be decentralized (delegated). Broad observation tells me this point is when a gym club reaches enrollment of about 500 students in three separate programs (separate curricula, goals, etc.). Failure to decentralize at 500/3 will usher in one of two results: the organization will stop growing; or the owner will slowly begin to go insane keeping up with things. Stated another way, as a gym club gets to about 500/3, the owner must decentralize or s/he will begin to neglect certain business functions, which is usually the development of systems or strategies. Sadly, I have seen too many gym club owners transgress from excitement to frustration, cynicism, bitterness and finally burnout because they couldn't keep up the pace required of their hub and spoke organizational strategy. (Related note: I don't believe that it is coincidental that the average club in the USA has about 500 students, or that many gym clubs hit an enrollment plateau of around 500 students.)

Hiring.

When the time arrives to hire an office manager, it must be done right

because this is one of the most important positions in your company! Longtime readers already know about the Kids First 5 Hiring Mantras that ground our hiring strategy. The first and most important mantra is: hire the character, train the skill. It should go without saying that honoring this mantra requires that the employee possess a mind capable of learning the skill and that your company possesses the ability to train the skill (or outsource the training). Character cannot be trained and failing to realize this will only bring pain and heartache to your company. Note that Kids First* has a specific definition of character that transcends generic definitions.

In addition to character, an office manager also should have a service attitude, organizational skills and an ability to quickly build rapport, as well as be a good decision-maker, problem solver; multi-tasker. At Kids First, a college education is far down the list as a criterion for hiring. Some of the finest Kids First employees do not have college degrees, including me. I have concluded entire important interviews without the subject even coming up.

What are the job responsibilities of an office manager?

I must split very important hairs here. Kids First does not have an “office manager,” it has a Hospitality Department Leader (DL). Just like every other DL, the Hospitality DL's first responsibility is to hire, fire and inspire his or her own team. Other things our Hospitality DL is also responsible for are: sales; registration;

client, class and marketing data management; and accounts receivable. To ensure financial control, never delegate receivables and payables to the same individual. It is important to emphasize that at Kids First, each DL is responsible for the financial health of his or her department. For the Hospitality Department, that means managing payroll, including pay scales for any employees in the department.

What about a trial employment period?

Trial employment periods of any length do not make sense to me because stellar performance is just as important on day 61 as it is on day one. No matter whether it is day 1, 61 or 601, a termination is in order if an employee ceases to fulfill his or her responsibilities. From a practical standpoint, I suppose an argument could be made for a trial employment period if a state's employment law allows an employer to terminate an employee during a trial period with less fear of a false discrimination.

Final advice on this subject: Let me sum up 34 years of gym club ownership and 18 years of BOOT CAMP experience. Assuming that you have adequate population and demographics, the right person in a customer service management position will justify his or her compensation by multiples. ✘

Make it a great month!

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