

Remote work: how to hire virtually and avoid toxic employees

When Attic Self Storage started in 2006 the founder vowed to ensure a healthy, nurturing culture. He built his business so that it could run with the staff on site or by working remotely, so customers can access their units without any help. In light of recent events, Frederic de Ryckman de Betz sheds light on how businesses can adapt to working remotely and how to interview for staff virtually to avoid toxic employees.

In any business, your remote working journey needs to begin with your customers. Fundamentally, an entrepreneur can't design any form of product or service without understanding their customer needs because the ultimate purpose of a business is to add value to a potential customer.

You need to understand them; their profile, why they need your product or service, and how they will use it. Sometimes, people can use the products or services in ways businesses hadn't considered. This could be, for example, customers using their storage unit as a venue to practice their musical instruments. Therefore, businesses need to be vigilant and pay attention to

customer behaviour.

Create the right culture and live it

In business, you need to set the scene and ensure it's the right one for the task at hand. It's important that your corporate culture should be built around the customer. Figure out what sort of culture would suit your customers and ensure that it's also embraced by your employees.

Business owners must demonstrate and live by a set ethos daily, as best practice starts at the top. As a business owner, you should be open, honest, approachable and encourage open dialogue amongst the team. The biggest risk to your business is a lack of trust, which will come from people being dishonest and looking to undermine their colleagues.

Where you have a problem, acknowledge it openly with your team, and ask for their patience while you deal with it. When you make mistakes, use them as an opportunity to set an example by admitting to your failures and weaknesses, and ask for help. If you build that trust with your team, they will continue to live the culture and give you the space to deal with any bad apples.

Hire the right people

When sifting through the pile of CVs, pay particular attention to candidates who have skills and experience in digital marketing, web design, user experience, sales/customer service and data. In the digital age data is the new gold. As businesses move into the digital realm they move further away physically from the customer.

As such, data enables you to get a full understanding of the needs of the customer. Along with the skill sets, the right person should also have the right attitude. If people aren't a natural fit with your desired culture, they could act as a drag on the team, reducing productivity and ultimately impacting the customers.

Involve your team

As you have the strategic foresight, you will be able to see what's coming down the tracks so you can anticipate changes in your resource requirements. However, consider involving the team in your hiring decisions in terms of the job description, initial triage of CVs and the later interview process.

By involving other team members in the recruitment process you can ensure

new hires are a good 'fit' for the team. By not involving existing staff in the hiring process, they risk feeling left out, undermined or left behind; and potentially creating a toxic culture when the new hire starts.

Interview virtually and successfully

The world is fast embracing the digital age, especially in the current climate – so businesses and employers should consider re-evaluating their hiring process to reflect this. The early parts of any interview process are generally about the technical requirements.

To save time, the first stage of vetting remotely is using a video conferencing software where two or more people can join the interview process with tools like Google Hangout, Zoom or Skype. Be sure to stay away from questions that could generate a simple yes or no response as this will not provide information about the candidate.

If needed, arrange more calls to allow for the conversation to become less formal and encourage the candidate to begin to relax so you can get a feel for who they are. Above all, never hire anyone simply because you feel like you're up against a deadline.

In 2006, Frederic de Ryckman de Betz launched Attic Self Storage, an independent self-storage operator. The first facility launched in Bow in 2008, and the second one in late 2016 near King's Cross. Attic Self Storage aims to provide outstanding customer experience and complete flexibility within a safe, secure and welcoming environment. Frederic is also a former Chairman of the SSA UK & Vice President of FEDESSA.

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