



ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING!

Hiring A First-Rate Manager

By Jeffrey Supnick

secretary, and occasionally a cop. Generally, that is a tall order to fill in just one person.

The skills that are necessary to carry out the manager's job—learning management software, policies and procedures for running the business, and operational issues—can be easily taught. The personal qualities and attributes, however, such as friendliness, compassion, integrity, motivation, and problem solving ability, generally are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to teach. These personal qualities are traits that make your manager a truly valuable asset.

When we place our classified advertisements for an on-site manager position, we typically do not mention self-storage. Unfortunately, self-storage is not well understood by many applicants who feel as though the business is not attractive or as fun and exciting as a first-generation industrial type location. We have found that people

The most important decision for any self-storage owner is hiring the right manager. After you have spent large sums of money on the right real estate location, facility features and amenities, marketing and advertisements, it is still the manager that greets each and every caller and person who walks in the door. Selecting the right person will pay dividends in customer satisfaction, ease in training, motivation, employee retention and above all increased sales and rentals. The manager is often the compelling reason why a prospect rents space from you.

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Finding the right manager for your self-storage facility can be a challenge. Before you offer a candidate the position, keep this in mind: Hire for attitude and train for skill.

All too often, you find an excellent candidate who says all the right things at the interview, has experience in self-storage, and is eager to begin working. You hire that person only to find out that he or she is not the person you thought you hired. Once in the position, they are not particularly motivated, do not seem to care about the image and cleanliness of your facility, do not wish to problem solve or take initiative, and are generally unwilling to go the extra mile.

Finding the right manager is more challenging than it looks. While sales ability is obviously important, your manager will be asked to be a master of many skills and capabilities such as salesperson, customer service representative, administrator, custodian, maintenance person, computer operator, accountant,

with retail experience often have the qualities we are looking for, so we direct our ads towards those individuals by asking something like, "Love retail but hate the hours?"

Since most initial inquiries from prospective tenants are by telephone, proper phone skills and etiquette are crucial ingredients for a great manager. For that reason, we like to start the screening process with a telephone interview. We go so far as to have all candidates call into a secondary line at our office and leave a message indicating their interest in the position. For those candidates who have a reasonably good phone persona, we ask that they e-mail their resume. Occasionally we have candidates who tell us that they would prefer to fax the resume since they do not use e-mail or do not know how to attach a file. This lack of

computerskills would call into question their competency since the ability to work and communicate via a computer is an essential tool. We also like to see how much time it takes to receive their resume from the time we speak on the phone until the time we receive the resume, as this shows initiative and interest.

After we have received a resume, we follow up with a telephone interview with the candidate. In both the phone message and the phone interview, we carefully listen for energy, tone of voice, and phone manners—the same type of qualities we want to have on our side when the phone rings at the self-storage office. On the phone, you can eliminate most of the people who call for your on-site manager's position. Some people sound inappropriate on the phone, some people are rushed and give the impression that they are not serious or do not really care, and some are just inarticulate.

The Interview Process

The manner in which you conduct an interview and determine which candidates are best suited to serve as your on-site manager is an area that is worth spending considerable time and effort. Most interviewers traditionally focus on background

and previous experience; these are no doubt important considerations, but it is a candidate's attitude that creates the types of results we are seeking.

During the interviewing process, seek to form a personal connection with the candidate; in doing so you will create an atmosphere whereby the candidate is more willing to open up and let you know what they are really about. Share your

vision and business philosophy with the candidate and wait to see if they share your vision by their expression, or lack thereof, upon hearing your vision. We want to determine not only that you as the owner will feel comfortable working with the candidate, but also that the candidate

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will be happy in the position and willing to perform up to the standards and principles to which you aspire. Here are the traits to look for:

- **Outgoing, Gregarious Personality:** People do business with people whom they like and who show an interest in them. A good interviewer can spot such a person easily. Such a person

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will be successful in getting the caller to your storage facility to come in and visit the facility. Visits to the facility most often result in rentals.

- Positive Attitude:** One of the challenges we often see with managers is a reluctance to raise rental rates. Rental rate management is often resisted by managers who mistakenly feel that the result of rental rate increases will be a mass exodus of tenancy. Having a positive attitude will enable a manager to do what it takes to get the job done, like showing the tenants why the facility offers the best combination of value and service, waiting a few extra minutes for a customer, cleaning and picking up trash, or going the extra mile for a customer.
- Independent Thinking And Problem Solving Abilities:** Not to take away from the importance of being a team player, but the truth is that most of the time your manager is working alone at the property. Being on the front line, the manager will come to see how the facility best works and apply insight into developing and modifying policies and procedures specific to the facility they manage and the clientele that they serve. One size does not fit all. We cannot train your managers for each and every eventuality that will come up in running a facility. Things often come up—from problem tenants to issues of a legal nature involving tenant auctions and liens or letting the ex-wife into a unit of her husband when she is not on the lease. The successful manager exhibits an ability to take the goals, principles, and objectives of the facility and its owner and translate those goals to decisions that uphold those values and business objectives.
- Honesty And Integrity:** We treat all managers with a skeptical eye as we perform audits at the facility level to assure financial accountability, but in

doing so it is better to start with an honest person managing the facility. Therefore, it is imperative that you carefully screen your candidates with background checks. These background checks can be accomplished quickly and at a modest cost by online services. We like to inform the candidate about the fact that they will be subjected to a background check as an opportunity for a kind of “confessional” before we get too far along. Some of these background checks have produced some very interesting results.


We have worked with a number of on-site self-storage managers with impeccable backgrounds and years of experience in the self-storage industry, yet they have failed to live up to our standards for conducting our business and treating customers the way they should be treated. To emphasize the distinction between the importance of background and capabilities versus the personal qualities we have been referring to, I will share some personal experiences that have occurred at facilities we operate as a third-party property management company.

Once we decided to terminate an extremely knowledgeable and experienced manager after a number of complaints from unhappy customers who felt mistreated. We replaced that manager with the assistant manager who had a winning personality, positive mental attitude, and loved her customers, but had only several months of experience. As a direct result of hiring the new manager, we found that occupancy at the facility increased dramatically as a result of the new manager’s efforts; we began to receive compliments on a consistent basis about the new manager. It was her personality that made the difference—not her experience.

In another case, our veteran manager left her position at a property that we manage; we replaced that manager with a new manager. We ask that our managers keep in contact with competing facilities. Our veteran manager was absolutely convinced that the manager of the facility down the street was hostile and uncooperative. Our new manager, who had

no previous experience in our business, received a phone call from a prospective tenant asking questions about our units and pricing. The prospective tenant also asked our brand new manager if she knew anything about the competing facility down the road because she was thinking about renting there. The new manager responded with a positive attitude about our competitor; she suggested that the caller visit the competing facility to check out what they have to offer and how clean their facility is, and then come visit our facility to see how clean and modern it is and check out our features.

Sometime later in the day, our new manager received a visit from a woman and she recognized her voice to be the prospective tenant with whom she spoke to earlier. The woman introduced herself as the manager of the competing facility down the road who was pretending to be Lisa, the prospective tenant, because she was “shopping” our facility earlier for information about our facility. She commended our manager on her professional demeanor during the conversation and for not speaking negatively about the competition. They agreed to check in with each other monthly to discuss the market and ways to work cooperatively in meeting tenants’ needs. They have formed a great business relationship and realize that there is enough business in the market for them to peacefully coexist. These examples are the types of things that are difficult to teach; managers either have this desirable personality and temperament or they do not.

Just remember: Hiring the right manager will not only make your job as an owner a great deal easier, but it will also make your facility a lot more successful and profitable. Hiring a manager with the right personality is well worth the time and effort it takes to find him or her. 

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