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**Guides to Practical Bookselling**

# Recruitment & Selection

Written for the Booksellers Association by Paul Ford, Retail  
Workshop

## 1. Getting the Basics Right

Successful retailing is very dependant on having the right team – trained, motivated and ready to serve your customers. But getting that team together and finding the right staff isn't always as easy as it seems.

Good recruitment practices and skilful selection can save a lot of time and money in helping proprietors to bring that team together. Get it wrong and the consequences can be disastrous; on team morale, on service levels, on customers – all resulting in a negative effect on your bottom line, profitability.

This BA booklet aims to give you the basics in recruitment and selection ideas and best practice to consider that will help you to prepare for and complete the process with minimum problems and maximum results.

## 2. Describing the Person for the Job

Once you've analysed what needs doing and described the job, you are ready to describe the sort of person who will be needed to do it. This description is sometimes called a Personnel Specification. Here are the chief aspects to consider:-

### Education

- ✚ What level of general education does the work require?
- ✚ What qualifications (if any) are necessary?

### Training

- ✚ Is any kind of specific job-related training required?
- ✚ If so, can it be provided after the person is appointed?

### Experience

- ✚ What type (if any) and length of previous experience is needed?

### General Intelligence

- ✚ What level of general mental ability is required?
- ✚ Are some kinds of mental ability more essential than others, e.g. verbal or numerical?

## Specific Abilities

- ✚ What specific skills and knowledge does the work call for?
- ✚ Must the new person have acquired all of these before beginning the job?
- ✚ Are they an avid book reader? Do they need to be for the job?

## Personality

- ✚ What type of person will fit in best with the existing team?
- ✚ What social skills will the person need in all relevant working relationships?
- ✚ What kind of disposition is required by the job – independence, docility, cheerfulness, accuracy, creativity etc?

## Physique and Health

- ✚ Are there any requirements of height, weight or strength?
- ✚ Are hearing, eyesight or other aspects of health important?
- ✚ Are general appearance, dress sense or voice of relevance?

## Personal Circumstances

- ✚ How close to work would the job-holder need to live?
- ✚ Would the job-holder need to work irregular hours?
- ✚ Would he or she need to be free to travel?

**NB** With each of the above, be sure to think about what would be the essential minimum as well as the desirable ideal.

Complete your list and have it ready for the interview – later.

## 3. Getting Suitable Applicants

The first step towards finding suitable applicants is to bring the job to their attention.

### 3.1 Use Your Contacts

Before you think of your usual methods and / or advertising in a newspaper or journal, consider these (for the most part) more cost effective alternatives.

- ✚ Invite an existing member of your team to take the post.
- ✚ Ask team members to recommend friends.
- ✚ Consult the store's files for unsuccessful applicants for similar previous posts.
- ✚ Mention the job to any individuals you know in other organisations who might be suitable, or who may know of someone suitable.

### 3.2 Advertising – Where and How Much?

If you need to advertise externally, consider these factors:-

- ✚ What kind of advertising will bring you the applicants you want at the least possible cost?
- ✚ How much can you afford to pay for advertising?
- ✚ How much is worth paying, considering the level of the job?
- ✚ Where is the best place to advertise – local student unions etc?
- ✚ Have you seen other organisations' advertisements for similar vacancies – and do they have any features you might want?
- ✚ What do you need to say in the advertisement, in order to attract suitable applicants – and discourage unsuitable ones?
- ✚ Consider an advertisement in the shop, in the window, and/or on your website.
- ✚ Your local Job Centre will display job details at no cost to you.

### 3.3 Advertising – The Detail

Before placing an ad, think about whether it, apart from attracting the right kind of applicants, presents the appropriate public image about your shop. Also, check that it gives sufficient detail about:-

- ✚ The name and nature of the job
- ✚ Job title
- ✚ A brief statement about the nature of the job and its responsibilities
- ✚ Where would the job be located
- ✚ Education and /or qualifications required
- ✚ Experience and/or training required
- ✚ Specific abilities required
- ✚ Personality features expected
- ✚ Requirements of physique or health
- ✚ Pay and other benefits
- ✚ How and when the application should be made?
- ✚ Does it, above all, avoid any suggestion that preference will be given on the basis of age, sex, marital status, colour, race, religion or belief, ethnic or national origin, sexual orientation or disability?

## 4. Dealing with Applications

However you intend to obtain applicants, will you want them to:

- ✚ Complete an application form
- ✚ Provide a CV
- ✚ Just tell you whatever they think is relevant in a letter of application
- ✚ Or send a CV, a form and a letter?

A closing date should be given for the receipt of applications.

From perhaps dozens of applicants, how do you draw up a shortlist of half a dozen candidates for interviewing?

- ✚ Be systematic – don't go by "general impressions".
- ✚ Prepare to read through the applications several times - thoroughly.
- ✚ Compare each applicant with the personnel specification you have drawn up.
- ✚ Eliminate any who do not meet essential requirements.
- ✚ If you still have too many applicants, eliminate those who do not meet desirable requirements.
- ✚ Of those that are left, choose those who seem closest to your ideal applicant.
- ✚ In addition to those you shortlist, pick a couple of reserve applicants in case some of those you invite for interview decide to withdraw their applications.
- ✚ Write a friendly letter to the short listed candidates:
  - Thanking them for applying
  - Inviting them for interview
  - Telling them where and when etc
  - Offering to consider an alternative time if necessary
  - Telling them who will be the interviewer(s)
  - Asking for any other information to be brought along
  - Telling them of any likely tests etc
  - Asking for details of any information that may have been omitted from their applications
  - Giving them relevant maps/ directions etc to find the bookshop

## 5. Preparing for the Interview

Here are the questions to ask yourself by way of preparation:-

- ✚ How many candidates will I be interviewing?
- ✚ Have I allowed plenty of time for each candidate, with at least 15 minutes between each interview?
- ✚ Shall I be the only interviewer or ask other members of staff to join in?

- ✚ Will candidates need to meet other members of staff?
- ✚ When might the interviews take place?
- ✚ Who will welcome the candidates and do they expect them?
- ✚ Will there be a convenient room available – totally private?
- ✚ Do candidates need to bring certificates or proof of qualifications with them?
- ✚ Do candidates need to bring along samples of work?
- ✚ Will candidates need to undertake a test or exercise that simulates the sort of work required?
- ✚ What documents/information will I need to take with me to the interview?
  - Job description
  - Personnel specification
  - Further particulars – job pay rates, holiday entitlement etc
  - Candidates' application forms
  - Any other details specific to the job?
- ✚ How shall I structure the interview?
  - What areas of questioning do I wish to cover – from the application form
  - If I am interviewing with colleagues, how do we share the questioning?
  - Shall I begin by talking about the job with the interviewee?
  - Do I need to ask for a demonstration or evidence of the candidates' skills?
  - How much time shall I allow for each area of discussion?
  - How shall I summarise and complete the interview?

## 5. Conducting the Interview

Here is a suggested sequence for your interviews to follow:

- ✚ Make sure you will not be interrupted. Chose a quiet, private environment.
- ✚ Plan seating so that you are all on the same level and avoid barriers (e.g. a desk) between you and the candidate
- ✚ Put the candidate at ease, eg by going to meet them, introducing yourself in a relaxed and friendly way, and making social conversation while accompanying them to the interview room.
- ✚ Introduce the other interviewers (if any).
- ✚ Thank them for coming to the interview and briefly mention some of the main points about your shop and the job.
- ✚ Go through the application form, using the questions you have highlighted and draw out the candidate's career biography by:-
  - Spending most time on their most recent work.
  - Getting the candidate to talk about their successes

- Discussing relations with colleagues
- Discussing any gaps in the work record
- Determining what has moved the candidate to change jobs
- Asking what the candidate expects from the new job
- Asking why the candidate feels suited to the job and the shop.
- 🗂️ Examine samples of the candidate's work or practical demonstration of abilities if appropriate.
- 🗂️ At the interview, invite the candidate to mention or expand on any experience or expertise that has not been adequately covered.
- 🗂️ Carry out a practical test that you have set up.
- 🗂️ Consider the following format and questions you might want to cover:
  - Ask about themselves
  - What they will bring to the job
  - What are their future ambitions
  - What personal goals do they have
  - Their strengths ( and ask for recent examples – work related)
  - Their weaknesses (and what they propose to do about them)
  - The last book they read (can take them by surprise as it's not immediately work related)
  - How they would juggle having to do 4 tasks at once ( see how they prioritise)
  - What has pleased them most in the last two years – both work and personal
  - What has disappointed them most in the last two years – both work and personal
  - What motivates them
  - What they are looking for in an employer/ in a job
  - What disappoints them?
- 🗂️ Consider giving them one or two scenarios and ask how they would react, eg
  - Customer demanding an unreasonable refund.
  - Colleague asking them to do something they can't, or that simply isn't their responsibility.
- 🗂️ Finish by asking them:-
  - What they will bring to the role / shop.
  - Why they should get the job.
  - If they have any questions for you.
- 🗂️ Tell the candidate what to expect now the interview is over: how, and by when, candidates will know whether they are to be made an offer or not.

## 7. Questioning Techniques

Your success in getting useful information from the candidate will depend on your ability to ask appropriate kinds of questions. The most basic distinction is between CLOSED questions, which invite only YES/NO response, or OPEN questions, which invite more expansive answers.

- ✚ Use OPEN questions when you want to:
  - Introduce new areas of discussion
  - Explore further
  - Link one response with an earlier one
  - Probe self-awareness
  - Get candidates to demonstrate their approach to problem-solving.

Use the following to help you with open questions – how, why, which, when, where and who etc.

- ✚ Use CLOSED questions only when:
  - A YES or NO is all you require.
  - Some other very specific response will suffice
  - You intend to follow with an OPEN question.

Use OPEN question more frequently than CLOSED or you will do most of the talking.

Avoid:-

- ✚ Leading questions – those that tell the candidate what kind of answer you expect.
- ✚ Package questions – multiple questions disguised as one.
- ✚ Unfair questions – especially about the job you are interviewing for which the candidate could not possibly be expected to know.
- ✚ Trick questions of any kind, they serve no purpose but to suggest that the interviewer is smarter than the candidate.
- ✚ Giveaway questions that suggest to the candidates that you have already decided for or against them.
- ✚ Sexist questions – if you wouldn't dream of asking a man what his arrangements were for childcare then don't ask a woman either.

If necessary have your questions written out. You'll be surprised how easy it is to "dry up" when you are interviewing.

Make notes as you proceed. It's easy to think you'll be able to remember all the points after the interview, the chances are you won't. Be aware that candidates have the right, under the Data Protection Act, to request to see any notes you make about them!

Another tip to consider; on the front of the application form write a brief description of the visual appearance of the candidate. It's much easier to recall them after you've carried out a few interviews. Even the best interviewer can get applicants mixed up.

## 8. Selecting and advising the candidate

If the interview process has gone well you'll be left with:-

- ✚ A number of applications forms with all the information you require
- ✚ Your own notes (from the interviews)
- ✚ Opinions from your team/colleagues/staff.

You now need to select the candidate whom you feel is the most appropriate.

Consider the following:-

- ✚ Does the candidate have the ability to do the job well
- ✚ Does he/she have enough motivation to do it well
- ✚ Would he/she fit in with the rest of the team
- ✚ Is any candidate satisfactory on all three criteria above
- ✚ If not, do you lower the standards or re-advertise
- ✚ If more than one candidate meets all three criteria, which one do you prefer and why?

Evaluating the interview notes.

- ✚ Do you still feel reasonably confident about the candidate
- ✚ Did you get the kind of information you needed out of the interview
- ✚ Which aspects of the candidate's interview were least satisfactory?

If you're faced with a decision between candidates you might want to consider asking them to come in and work in the shop for (say) a day / half day. That way:-

- ✚ You'll get to see them first hand
- ✚ They'll have a chance to consider if they will enjoy working in your shop.
- ✚ Your other team members will get a chance to meet / contribute.

If you arrange a trial day, pay the candidate as a “casual” but don’t expect them to be able to do / know everything.

Once you’ve made your decision:-

- ✚ Contact the chosen candidate by telephone and offer them the job
- ✚ If yes – process with the offer letter and admin
- ✚ If no - contact your next choice
- ✚ When selected candidate says yes – send all other applicants a letter of thanks and tell them they’ve not been successful but that you’ll hold their application form on file and contact them if there are any other suitable vacancies.

In short, don’t burn your bridges, you may wish to see them again, sooner than you think.

## 9. Preparing for the New Member of Staff

Now all that’s left to do is to get everything ready for the new member of staff:-

- ✚ Tell the current team – who/ what/ when.
- ✚ Prepare all documentation necessary – e.g Terms & Conditions of Employment.
- ✚ Put together an induction timetable, detailing procedural information (e.g. disciplinary and grievance procedures, rules on entering and leaving premises etc) and giving times of training in practical procedures in the shop.
- ✚ Allocate some time with the new employee on their first day.
- ✚ Take up references – don’t be tempted not to bother. You don’t know the candidate yet and they may not have been totally truthful.
- ✚ Confirm in writing all the joining details to your new team member, including mentioning that you’ll be taking up references. It might be a help to ask them to sign a “job acceptance” note and return it to you.
- ✚ Ask them to bring their P45 (or NI number, if P45 not available) and details of the bank account into which they wish their salary to be paid.

## 10. Review the Process

Once it’s all completed sit back and consider:-

- ✚ What worked in the job filling process
- ✚ What didn’t work
- ✚ Ideas in how the next process can be even better..

But with good recruitment practices and careful selection that may not be necessary for some time – we hope!

## 11. Further Information

The BA has a free Business Support Helpline which is available to members. It offers advice on Tax, VAT, PAYE, Employment & Personnel, Health & Safety and Commercial Legal matters. It is open from 8.00am to 6.00pm Monday-Friday. Please contact Meryl Halls or Susanne Vangnoo at the BA (0207 802 0802) for further details.

There are several organisations which offer advice on employment legislation and related areas:

ACAS: [www.acas.org.uk](http://www.acas.org.uk)

Department of Trade and Industry: [www.dti.gov.uk](http://www.dti.gov.uk)

Business Link: [www.businesslink.gov.uk](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk)

Tailored Interactive Guidance on Employment Rights: [www.tiger.gov.uk](http://www.tiger.gov.uk)

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