Mission-driven advertising

"Makes you want to work there"

by Margaret Leitch Copeland, Susan Gimilaro, and Nancy Sullivan

We care for and teach 71 children aged six weeks to five years. We believe that children grow and learn at their own pace. We respect and encourage this individual rate of development. We prepare environments with age-appropriate activities that foster social skills, self-esteem, and intellectual stimulation. We are open from 6:30 AM to 6:00 PM, Monday through Friday, year round. We offer competitive salary and benefits. We are proud members of the National Association of Episcopal Schools and the Alliance for Better Childcare. We are licensed by the State, and we are a registered training program with the Apprenticeship Council. We follow the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) Code of Ethical Conduct. Many of our staff hold professional credentials from our State. We have received numerous awards and recognitions in our 14-year history. Our most recent achievement was earning the very first Licensed Plus status in the entire State. You may have what it takes to join our prestige team. To learn more about our program and the teaching opportunity available in our Infant Program in Portsmouth, call Pat at 123-4567.

The director’s challenge

When directors sit down to advertise for new staff, it is often not a happy moment. Do they think of writing a Help Wanted Ad similar to the one above? Perhaps not, because:

1. Someone has left or has been fired for failing to meet expectations.
2. The director is angry with the person who gave no notice, sad that a person’s family is relocating, bruised by a difficult exit interview, or frustrated by the continuous turnover in the field.

The director is worrying about having to substitute in a classroom while the managerial work piles up.

Time is limited and the pressure mounts, often resulting in a quickly written Help Wanted ad.

Directors quite naturally write ads from their perspectives as employers and sometimes emphasize that attribute which the leave-taking staff member lacked, e.g. “must be reliable,” leading an applicant to believe that reliability is a big issue at this program. The last thing the director has in mind is the center’s mission statement, which needs to be central in the hiring process.

Mission-driven recruiting: Lessons from corporate America

How are you going to attract applicants to your center? What do you want applicants to know about your organization? Do you want them to know anything about your program before they apply? Are you merely seeking to ‘fill an opening’ in your staff or are you looking for a person whose philosophy and talents are compatible to the mission of your program? An opening can provide an opportunity for strategic reflection and redirection as you search for the ‘right’ candidate — the one who can meaningfully contribute to attaining the
How to make a positive impression

Here are some general guidelines for making a positive impression of your program in help wanted advertisements.

1. With each ad your center is trying to market or sell itself as a great employer to prospective employees, in particular, motivated and talented people. The ad needs to be descriptive enough to entice applicants and compel them to read further. Starting with your mission statement sets the tone.
2. First things first: Emphasize the center’s accreditation and quality rating.
3. Consider every word and proofread for errors. Some phrases are stoppers such as “must pass criminal background check.” While true, this sets the professional standard at the lowest point: no criminals. This is a far cry from credentialed early childhood professionals!
4. Avoid jargon and ambiguous words. Be aware of geographic differences in the meanings of different words.
5. Do not assume that it will be difficult from the start to find staff members for various shifts and positions.
6. While ads may be expensive to run, the least expensive ad may not necessarily be the shortest ad, but rather the one that runs only once because it brings in a successful candidate. The most expensive ad is the one that is too brief to attract applicants or that attracts applicants who do not match your needs.
7. Seek out inexpensive recruiting tools: colleges, professional web sites, e-mail distribution lists, etc.

The power of word-of-mouth advertising

In addition to the center’s mission statement, your staff members can participate in the recruiting process in a number of ways. By holding a focus group with current staff members, a director can generate quotes to use in an ad by asking the staff to describe the work environment, the training opportunities, the tangible and intangible benefits of working at the center:

- “I enjoy working on a teaching team.”
- “I like the fact that I worked full-time at first, went on maternity leave, came back part-time at first, and then when my baby could come with me, I came back full-time.”
- “It is important to me that this center is on the bus route.”
- “I am proud to work at an accredited center.”

The staff can also help with brainstorming: who would be perfect for this job? How would you describe the new member of your dream team?

Consider the professional opportunities available to post job openings at local conferences or on web sites. Even when there are no known openings, conference postings are read by candidates and colleagues alike and provide an additional tool to publicize the center’s mission and work environment. Ideally, a good ad will “pique the interest of passive candidates (qualified and happily employed candidates)” who browse web sites just to keep an eye out for good opportunities (The Asian Pacific Headhunter, 2005). A center’s web site can also be an effective recruiting tool and complement print advertising. Some print ads can be brief but refer applicants to the center’s web site to view the complete mission statement and for more information about the program. Ideally, the center’s web site will also be up-to-date with mailing instructions, contact names, and an online or downloadable application.

Closing the loop

Once your ad is written and placed, ask the applicants who responded what appealed to them about the ad and your center. Be prepared with your selling