



Kickstart HR co-founder
Lewisa Anciano: projecting
personnel growth is an
essential part of any
business plan

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Avidworx Productions founder
Marcel Newell: "I knew from Day 1
I couldn't do it by myself"

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Growth options

The best way to hire support staff is to plan ahead and thoroughly audit the company's needs

JOEL MCKAY

When David Watts found himself organizing the company mail one night after a long day of work, he knew it was time to hire some help.

"I thought to myself, 'I'm not working for myself doing mail at 10 o'clock at night. This is ridiculous,'" recalled Watts, principal of Vancouver-based David Watts Notary Public.

The thought of hiring support staff to balance the books or take care of the office can be a daunting task for many small businesses.

It probably means the venture has graduated to a point where there's too much work for one person to handle, but it

also heralds new complexities such as recruitment, payroll and training.

Watts' company was two years old when he became his own mail clerk. It was the winter of 2009 and he had recently fired his only two employees. The recession was partly to blame, Watts said, but so was he.

Prior to the downturn, things were going so well he hired administrative help almost immediately after he launched the business.

"I hired people because people were available, not necessarily because I needed them at the time," he said. "It took me a while to figure out that at that time it

probably wasn't the right move."

When the market crashed in 2008 the business flew out the door.

Almost overnight, Watts' company went into survival mode and he downsized. But within a few months, his clients returned and he soon needed more help than ever.

Instead of making the same mistake twice, Watts decided to hire part-time employees in case things turned sour again.

Fortunately they didn't, and it was just enough help to allow Watts to focus on building his core business.

"I was able to grow my business rather than doing the day-to-day work, then I



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- David Watts, notary public

Newell, who founded audio display company Avidworx Productions Inc.

Early on, he hired the wrong accountant, and it took a year and a half before Avidworx was able to straighten its books out again.

He believes business owners should understand the role or position that needs to be filled before they hire someone for it, but that's not often the case.

"They're afraid of it, they don't know it, they don't want to know it and they get taken," he said. "There's no point in bringing someone else in if they don't know how to do it themselves."

Watts agrees.

He says it's obvious in a business when there's too much work for one person to handle, and that leads many owners to think they should hire a full-time staff member right away.

He believes it's important to audit the company's needs before anyone is hired.

"Rather than think of how I can fill a person's week to hire them, I look at it more as tasks," he said. "Can this task go to my current staff? If not, can I do it? If not, can I hire someone to do it? If I get to a point where I have enough things to hire someone for, do I bring someone in full time or just outsource as much as I can?"

Anciano said every business will have individual HR requirements, but the sooner a company plans for workforce growth the better positioned it is to take advantage of the good times and weather the bad.

"Success begets success," Anciano said. "If you have great HR practices you can groom and develop and grow people [and] they bring more revenue and business." ■

was able to hire someone who is still with me now and is excellent."

A lack of human resources and hiring know-how is common with many first-time business owners, says Lewisa Anciano. She sits on the board of the BC Human Resources Management Association, and recently launched Kickstart HR, a tool kit for new businesses.

"I really believe with HR you always dig your well before you're thirsty," Anciano said. "A lot of us react to it as a knee jerk; HR is the last thing [you think of]."

Kickstart offers 70 comprehensive ready-to-go tools, templates and checklists to help companies implement HR practices on a "shoestring" budget. Anciano says it's the perfect system for companies that need to hire help but don't know where to start.

"[As with] any small business, the last thing you can afford is human resources because you're up and doing operations ... [the tool kit] is content that you can lock and load and put in place in a matter of weeks," she said.

The tool kit is customizable and allows

a small-business owner to plan out an employee "life cycle," which includes everything from recruitment and orientation to training and succession.

Anciano believes it's more difficult for small businesses to recruit and retain top employees because they have to compete with large companies that have deep pockets.

"You have to be even sharper and smarter with your HR practices," she said. "The unfortunate thing with a small business is you can't afford to bring in a consultant."

A lack of HR expertise created some bumps along the road for Marcel

Landed learning

- Plan the life cycle of your employees from recruitment to succession
- Learn about the role that needs to be filled before hiring
- Hire when there's enough work to warrant it; otherwise, outsource