

# FINDING “THE ONE”



Eight steps to follow in the search for your next employee.

**F**inding a qualified employee who will fit well within the funeral service environment is the goal of all funeral home business owners and managers. Unfortunately, this can be a challenging task, especially for owners of small funeral home businesses with limited HR resources. But there is a path you can follow that can increase your chances of finding that “one” key employee out of the masses who apply.

## STEP

**1** Before getting started, make sure you have a job description for the position to be filled and that it's up to date. Job descriptions are the central foundation point for both you and the employee. It is a document that identifies your expectations for the position as well as key responsibilities and tasks that the employee should fulfill. Potential employees can determine if they have the abilities and qualifications to meet all of the requirements of the position.

At the same time, create a job description Key Qualities (KQ) list, which has, in order of priority, the top 10 skill, experience or educational requirements that a qualified candidate should have for the position. You will be using the KQ list later in the hiring process. For example, if you are trying to locate a qualified funeral director/embalmer, you would likely list “must have funeral director/embalmer license” for your state as one of the top three KQs. Another example would be to

list as a top KQ “must have at least a bachelor’s degree in business” for a bookkeeping position. The KQs should be very specific to the position you are trying to fill.

## STEP

**2** After reviewing the job description, determine what the starting salary and benefits will be for the position. This requires research on what current salaries are for someone with the level of experience you desire and the type of work to be performed. While it may seem logical to simply offer what the previous employee in the position was earning, it may not be an attractive salary in today's competitive market. Funeral service is an industry that requires special educational achievements, licenses and skills (e.g., funeral directors, embalmers, preneed sales staff, etc.). Therefore, many employers find themselves courting the same applicants. Additionally, job searches are no longer simply lim-

ited to the immediate area in which the business is located. Today, applicants can come from other regions or states. If that is a possibility, consider adding relocation costs or other moving benefits to your potential salary offer.

### STEP

**3** Writing the job posting can be intimidating for an employer. Most struggle to compose an attention-grabbing post that will result in a strong pool of qualified candidates. The cost of advertising also plays a part in the development of the posting. Larger ads that are more expensive may be advantageous when seeking candidates with special skills and experience. Smaller job postings may be sufficient for more common administrative positions. While it is not necessary for a business to identify itself by name in a job posting, it is advantageous to identify the industry as funeral service in order to attract candidates who have specific experience. Pick out elements from the job description that are priorities for the success of the potential employee and incorporate those into the job posting. Make your business stand out by using key words that paint an attractive work environment, such as “teamwork oriented,” “friendly and respectful,” “learning opportunities,” “community trusted,” etc.

### STEP

**4** The next course of action is to identify where to search for qualified candidates and how you can motivate them to apply for the position. There are several methods available to locate applicants, including word of mouth, local newspapers, job fairs, colleges, industry publications and job search websites. The Internet has become the most common tool in reaching a large number of potential applicants either locally or nationally. The key is to target the correct Internet tools. For example, if you have an entry-level position that can be filled by a recent college graduate, then it would be appropriate to post a notice of the position on the employment assistance websites of various secondary or mortuary schools. For those positions that need more experienced employees, there are several different online job search engines available to reach a larger audience. Additionally, funeral service publications frequently have online employment advertising that may be appropriate.

### STEP

**5** Finding the right person is somewhat like buying a new house – you’re not likely to find one that has every item on your wish list. So how do you know

*Finding the right person is like buying a house – you’re not likely to find one that has every item on your wish list. So how do you know who to bring in for an interview? Remember the Key Qualities list you created from the job description? Pull it out and begin comparing the résumés with the top 10 items you’re seeking in a qualified candidate.*

who to bring in for an interview? Remember the KQ list you created from the job description? Pull it out and begin comparing the résumés with the top 10 items you are seeking in a qualified candidate. Separate the résumés into two piles – one for candidates who do not have at least six of the top 10 requirements (do not interview) and another with those who do possess at least six of the top 10 requirements (interview). If the number of résumés received is substantial, increase your interview standards to eight of the top 10 on the KQ list. Contact the individuals in your interview stack and begin scheduling interviews as quickly as you reasonably can. Interviews can be conducted in person or by phone, depending on the candidate’s location. As it is typical for prospective employers to pay travel expenses for those candidates traveling a great distance, telephone interviews are a good initial step to determine whether it is appropriate to incur these costs.

### STEP

**6** Conducting a revealing first interview is critical to identifying the best candidate for the position. Remember, this an initial interview to help you start narrowing down the field of candidates to find the best potential employee. This initial interview can be conducted by a designee if you desire. Once again, the position’s job description becomes a powerful tool as the interviewer uses it to draft questions that allow candidates to provide examples of how they can meet the qualifications. For example, if the job description indicates that the position requires the employee to provide a high level of customer service, ask a question such as, “Can you describe a situation in which you feel you successfully assisted an unhappy family?” Make a note of the responses and use follow-up questions so you get a good impression on how the candidate handled the situation. Make sure that your top 10 qualifications from the list are addressed during the interview.

This is also an appropriate time to have potential employees complete any employment testing (e.g., personality profiles, math test, etc.). After the interview, score how well the employee met the qualifications required by the position on a 1 to 5 metric (1 is low and 5 is high), as well as their responses to the interview questions. Tally up the totals for each prospect. Based on total scores, ask the top three candidates back for second interviews.

Second interviews can include other key members of your business team, especially those who may be working closely with the new addition. Have a new set of questions that expand on the job description profile. Pose “how

would you handle” questions and provide more information to the candidate about the work environment. For example, you can ask a prospective funeral director: “How would you handle a customer who had a poor funeral experience with a competing firm?” or “Describe a situation in which you successfully worked with a very demanding family. What experience or skills did you draw on to make this a successful experience?”

Try to gain a clearer sense of who each candidate is and how his or her personality will fit into the current work environment. Ask current employees who participated in the interviews to provide written perceptions of the candidates.

## STEP

**7** Now comes the big finish. How do you make your final selection? Rather than basing your decision on how well the candi-

dates performed in the first interview or how well their résumés match the job description, take a more global view. Review how the top three candidates moved through your interview process. Consider how well you felt they would blend into your work environment. Do you see them adding value? Did the other employees who participated in the interview process feel more comfortable with one candidate than another? Is there one candidate that really stands above the other(s)? If so, then you have found your “one.”

But what happens if none of the final three meet the standards you set or they just don’t fit well with the personalities of current employees? Start the process over from Step 1. Review each step in the process to determine if there needs to be any adjustments that can help you refine your search and increase your chances of finding the appropriate applicant. Continue

repeating this process until you find the “one.”

## STEP

**8** So you found him or her! Now what? Make a written job offer to the potential employee that re-emphasizes the responsibilities of the position, the starting salary, any benefits, any pre-employment requirements and the proposed starting date. Make sure there is a time limit on how long the job offer stays on the table. Don’t be afraid to negotiate if the prospect comes back asking for revisions to the job offer. Consider whether or not you can meet the request(s). If so, you can redraft the offer to include those items. Otherwise, let the prospect know that the offer stands as presented. An acceptance of the job offer means you have accomplished your goal. Should he or she decline, continue on your search following this process. Don’t forget to consider the remaining candidates who were part of your top three to determine if either may actually be suitable.

Don’t be daunted by this process. All funeral home employers face the same challenge. The most critical aspect is the job description for the position. This is the foundation for your hiring process for any position. From there, the other steps will fall into place. By having a structured process, the business increases its odds of finding a quality prospect to add to the team. Furthermore, the job description provides you with a tool that can be used in the future for reviews, managing work responsibilities and employee training. ✦

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