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## Who Do You Hire?

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When I left the for-profit world to work for a children's museum, I experienced culture shock—not because it was so different, but because it was essentially the same. I was eager to leave my grueling experience hiring for the retail industry and thought how much easier—even fun—it would be to work at a mission-driven organization. (Go ahead and laugh.) But I've learned that hiring at a children's museum is even more complex and complicated than what I left behind.

My first hiring assignment was to find "Museum Interpreters," as our gallery/exhibit staff was called at the time. I interviewed applicants who were fluent in French, Chinese and Spanish and wanted to "interpret" (i.e. translate) the museum experience for visitors. There were applicants with docent experience, "I just *must* work in the Arts!" And of course, applicants who wanted to teach. A passion for working with children is vital, but were they aware of just how far we push the informality in informal learning here?

There is no perfect formula for how the Minnesota Children's Museum and other museums find talented and gifted individuals, but there are two things we (now) do: 1) provide applicants with detailed expectations of the job; and 2) have them audition their play skills.

**Expectations of the job.** Yes, it is important that a person "loves working with children" but they also must love picking up the turtle costume seventy-two times a day, pleasantly pointing out the location of the restroom thirteen times each hour and climbing through an anthill to retrieve little Timmy's left shoe, glasses and possibly his little sister. There's also the required wearing of the Clifford costume, providing first aid, selling tickets, etc.

These details, if not written down for the job applicant, will come back to haunt you. Also, find out when an applicant has gone beyond the call of duty in a previous job situation, because that's the attitude you'll need.

**Play skills.** The second key to finding good employees is the audition. During the interview, everyone says they have excellent customer service skills, but would they honestly tell you that they are really "grumpy and reserved"? Take the applicant out to the exhibits and give them one task: find a family to play with. This cuts to the chase. They either have the gift—or the sheer goofiness—to insert themselves into a family's experience or they don't. This isn't a training issue. You provide tools, hints, examples of success and encouragement, but these aren't jobs for the timid. You can't train people to be gregarious, exude charm and chutzpa (yes, chutzpa)! The audition quickly hones the decision-making process.

So, that's the magic. People apply and we add the details, the audition, a bit of luck and somehow we find the incredible floor staff essential to our visitors' experiences.