

# BETTER SAFE THAN SORRY

*Says Fran Ryba*

The cut and chase involved in setting up a new company can be pure adrenalin and takes enormous energy and commitment. But in their quest for business, managers ignore at their peril, employment policies and responsibilities, warns human resources (HR) consultant Fran Ryba.

Increasingly, top professionals in the field of recruitment are signalling to companies that if they fail to attract and retain workers their businesses will not succeed. Arguments supporting people rather than capital as the most important factor of production are gaining strength. The winning companies will be those providing enough opportunities and rewards to attract people with the right skills to take the business forward. These skills are portable and include problem solving and communication skills. So how do you make sure you hold onto your best people?

"There's a minefield of employment policies to negotiate and it's important to get it right from the start," says Ryba who has extensive experience of the HR field and now runs Fran Ryba Consultancy. "Recent research has shown that around 90 percent of owner-managers are worried about being taken to employment tribunals. If they had clear employment policies and procedures in operation and were up to date on contractual and legal obligations there is no need to be concerned."

According to Ryba it pays to invest time right from the start in recruiting the best people in the market and setting them up properly in their new posts. There is little point in going to the trouble and expense of recruiting good people only to lose them 18 months later because there were no clear objectives of what is expected of them and misunderstandings crept in.

Employees, whether part or full-time, should be given an employment contract – a clear agreement covering the essential terms and conditions of employment, as well as a detailed job description. A systematic induction process will help them quickly find their feet and give them an understanding of the corporate culture and values.

"Rules governing the business operations and expectations about the employees' conduct and performance can be oppressive and demotivating, so it's important they are presented in a positive way," says Ryba. "New members of staff need to understand their obligations but also feel free enough to be creative in their approach to their work."

Everyday occurrences should also be thought about – it's not just about how much holiday employees may take but taking a stance on lateness and absence.

"If employers don't let staff know what they are supposed to do if, say, they are ill or late, this can lead to enormous confusion and lower efficiency. You can't expect people to come to work if they are ill, but you do need to decide how much you will pay them beyond the limits of statutory sick pay – and then there may be exceptions to this you wish to consider," adds Ryba.

Issues around confidentiality – not divulging trade secrets to a competitor – and limits on the use of e-mail and internet access must also be considered and clear policies drawn up.

"It's the holes in the employment policy which lead to misinterpretation and it is this which can leave a company open to being sued. It is vital that the employee's first contact with the new employer is experienced as professional and firm and for this you need a strong HR presence."

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