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## harmony & happiness:

sensible staffing and the path to profitability



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# High-Performance Leasing and Your Staff

## Hiring, training and motivating a winning team

*By Greg Call*

**T**hese days, self-storage competes on a very aggressive playing field, and a winning lineup of storage specialists is the most critical aspect of the game. Mom-and-pop squads, once the dynamic duos of the industry, have been replaced by teams of high-performance players. Coming on the field are new recruits who brandish business and marketing degrees to devastate competitors. These draftees often come from Fortune 500 companies and are driven by a desire to earn a good wage and large bonuses. Incentive is what differentiates them from their forerunners.

### **Hire the Team**

Hiring this high-performance lease-up team is no easy task. First, your employment offer must explain the opportunity and create the necessary desire in a mere two or three sentences. Local, regional and national publications can be implemented to attract a number of viable resumes.

After properly screening resumes and performing initial background checks, you'll want to conduct phone interviews to narrow the field, minimizing time and expense before live interviews take place. You can even administer aptitude tests online to eliminate weaker candidates.

When the big day comes, it's just as important to have an expert interviewer as it is to have several qualified applicants. If you're not experienced in the interview process, you can find many helpful titles at book stores and libraries. A good interviewer brings out the best and worst in candidates. He sets them at ease while simultaneously intimidating them. He arouses anger and suspicion as well as trust, the whole time making note of their responses.

After the interviews, narrow your list to two candidates, and conduct a second interview. This time around, one contender will likely stand out. Ask as many questions as you need to, but make sure to ask the most important one of all: Why are you the best person for the job? The answer will tell you if the candidate really has what it takes and wants the position.

### **Train the Team**

The issue of team training is the subject of much discussion and debate. Owners banter it around until they have the best strategy or no strategy at all. It's important to have a game plan, because employees are often instructed by someone who may not be a good teacher or communicator. If your training resources are limited, make the process as simple and foolproof as possible for coach and player.

I personally prefer the outline/note-taking method. The trainer follows a basic outline, filling in details along the way, and the trainee records it all in a spiral-bound notebook. The recruit should take copious notes and ask lots of questions, as his notebook will also serve as his reference manual when he has questions in the future.

The trainer is also responsible for demonstrating every facility procedure in the appropriate number of steps. The employee should note these in detail and commit them to task in front of his coach, who will offer feedback and advice as he supervises. Once the training is complete, the employee should take a final test to determine if he is qualified to go on the field.

Once the employee passes his exam, on-the-job training is very effective as reinforcement. With appropriate supervision, it allows for few mistakes and a quick learning curve. After approximately two weeks, the new hire should be ready to play—with ongoing assistance.

## Set Goals

Keep your eye on the ball. Establish your business goals and articulate them to staff, differentiating between short- and long-term objectives. To say you wish to rent a certain number of spaces each month is not enough. What is your ultimate aim? Do you want to reach a certain stabilized occupancy or profit margin? To make goals more readily achievable, communicate the specifics to your team.

In addition to establishing goals, it's equally vital to create an incentive plan that meshes with the facility's budget and income. Today's employees are more highly motivated by reward. So create a program that attracts and retains key players. When your staff strives for greater income, the business will also benefit.

Take a look at the accompanying chart, which outlines a general budget for advertising and promotions, a plan for lease-up, and an estimate for bonuses. Note that incentives are affected positively or negatively by facility as well as personal performance, i.e., percentage of delinquency and mystery-shopping scores. This plan has been successfully applied in many storage operations. You can adopt or modify it for your own use.

## What You Need

Let's review. You need a high-performance lease-up team for success in today's competitive environment. First, hire the right team members. Then coach them in facility policies and procedures. Next, establish goals, and communicate them to the entire staff.

Finally, create an incentive plan to keep employees motivated and performing at optimum levels.

Here's what you need:

- A solid physical plant, i.e., a great facility with many differentiating features that benefit customers.
- A realistic budget designed to achieve objectives as well as an aggressive but realistic lease-up schedule and incentive program.
- A strong hiring policy complete with well-defined job descriptions.
- A comprehensive training program.
- Checks and balances such as in-person and phone mystery-shopping services.
- Sound supervision to lead the staff to victory.

With these field advantages, your team will take it to the goalpost every time. Keep in mind that your high-performance players, motivated as they are by incentive, may want to move on once you've achieved lease-up. It's in their nature, and that's why you hired them! So let them move on, and replace them with a maintenance team that requires lower salaries and bonuses. 📌

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## ADVERTISING, LEASE-UP AND BONUS PLAN

MONTH	04/05	05/05	06/05	07/05	08/05	09/05	10/05	11/05	12/05	01/06	02/06	03/06	04/06	05/06	TOTAL
SBC Yellow Pages	1,573	1,573	1,573	1,573	1,698	1,698	1,698	1,698	1,698	1,698	1,698	1,698			19,876
Verizon Yellow Pages															
Yellow Book															
Advo Direct Mail				1,000	2,000	2,000	1,000								6,000
PennySaver Direct Mail				1,000	2,000	2,000	1,000								6,000
ValPac Direct Mail				1,000	2,000	2,000	1,000								6,000
B-to-B Target Mail			5,000						5,000		5,000				15,000
Radio				500	5,000	500	5,000	500							11,500
Cable TV				10,000	1,000	10,000	1,000	10,000							32,000
Door Hangers				10,000	3,500	10,000	3,500								27,000
Flier Programs			2,000												2,000
Special Promotions							5,000								5,000
On-Site Visuals			2,000	4,000	2,000										8,000
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,573</b>	<b>1,573</b>	<b>10,573</b>	<b>19,073</b>	<b>25,698</b>	<b>21,698</b>	<b>25,698</b>	<b>15,698</b>	<b>6,698</b>	<b>1,698</b>	<b>6,698</b>	<b>1,698</b>			<b>138,376</b>
Self-Storage Net Units	32	37	42	46	42	37	32	29	23	23	23	32	29	37	464
RV Net Units	7	9	10	11	10	9	7	6	5	5	5	7	6	9	106
Total Net Units	39	46	52	57	52	46	39	35	28	28	28	39	35	46	570
Percent Per Month	7%	8%	9%	10%	9%	8%	7%	6%	5%	5%	5%	7%	6%	8%	100
Manager Bonus	1,190	1,360	1,530	1,700	1,530	1,360	1,190	1,020	850	850	850	1,190	1,020	1,360	17,000
Assistant 1 Bonus	560	640	720	800	720	640	560	480	400	400	400	560	480	640	8,000
Assistant 2 Bonus	560	640	720	800	720	640	560	480	400	400	400	560	480	640	8,000
Assistant 3 Bonus	560	640	720	800	720	640	560	480	400	400	400	560	480	640	8,000
Assistant 4 Bonus	560	640	720	800	720	640	560	480	400	400	400	560	480	640	8,000
<b>TOTAL BONUS</b>	<b>3,430</b>	<b>3,920</b>	<b>4,410</b>	<b>4,900</b>	<b>4,410</b>	<b>3,920</b>	<b>3,430</b>	<b>2,940</b>	<b>2,450</b>	<b>2,450</b>	<b>2,450</b>	<b>3,430</b>	<b>2,940</b>	<b>3,920</b>	<b>49,000</b>
Delinquency Effect on Standard Bonus: >5% = Lose Bonus \ 5% = -10% Bonus \ 4% = -5% Bonus \ 3% = No Change \ 2% = +5% Bonus \ 1% = +10% Bonus															
Phone-Shop Effect on Standard Bonus: >70% = Lose Bonus \ 70% = \$0 Bonus \ 80% = \$50 Bonus \ 90% = \$100 Bonus \ 100% = \$150 Bonus															