

WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT

TO FIND & RETAIN GOOD CUSTODIAL WORKERS?

Whether a company or organization chooses to perform their custodial services using an inhouse or outsourced solution, one problem always persists: finding and retaining good custodial workers. This document will explore some reasons why it is difficult to locate and keep custodians, and possible strategies to help alleviate this difficulty.

REASONS FOR THE DIFFICULTY

1. The perception of the job is poor, and work is under-appreciated.

"I mean we aren't talking rocket science here, how hard can it be to clean toilets and empty the trash?" This actual statement from a prospective client unfortunately describes how many people and companies view janitors and janitorial work. Additionally, and unfortunately, a custodian's work is rarely noticed unless there is problem. It is rare that someone in your organization will comment on how clean the building looks, or that you never run short on hand soap or toilet paper. However, if a trash can is missed one time, you will likely hear about that!

2. The wages are low.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the median wage for custodians in the United States is \$12.02/hour, or \$24,990 annually. If you remove the custodians working in government agencies and public schools, which are generally higher paid, from the custodial pool, the median wage for custodians is even lower.

3. The work is difficult and physically demanding.

Janitorial work is hard, and often, unpleasant. Depending on the environment, janitorial work includes cleaning all types of bodily fluids, removing trash filled with food, liquids and other items, lifting heavy bags of trash, and scrubbing floors. Custodians are constantly in motion with little time for small talk or rest.

4. The hours are largely 2nd shift.

A great deal of janitorial work is performed during the least popular work shift – 2nd or swing shift. While some companies and organizations have moved their custodial team to first shift, most still want these services completed after 5:00 pm. This timing is understandable as this is when the spaces are generally emptier and therefore easier to clean, and the cleaning process is less disruptive to the primary business function.

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5. The position is temporary.

Many people working in custodial positions are doing so to fund a temporary budget shortfall, save money for a large purchase, or pay off some type of debt. Fortunately, this need to earn money tends to produce a good number of part-time candidates. Additionally, if a person is willing to work a second job to earn more money, they are typically a hard worker. Unfortunately, when the bill is paid off or the money is raised for that purchase, this worker will move on and leave a vacancy that now needs to be filled.

STRATEGIES FOR FINDING & RETAINING GOOD CUSTODIAL WORKERS

1. Increase the Wages

While this may place a strain on your budget, you will likely attract better candidates if you pay just a bit more. If the local fast food restaurants are paying similar wages as you are for custodians, you may not get many candidates. Additionally, providing merit increases on a regular basis, even if small, to your best custodial team members may encourage them to remain with your company.

2. Acknowledge Good Work

Everyone, regardless of their role, wants to be acknowledged for their good work. As mentioned previously, custodians are rarely praised for their work. Therefore, recognize their work publicly via email or bulletin board. Gather and share positive opinions of the cleanliness of your facility with your custodial team. Acknowledge and celebrate those who have completed milestone dates with your company - 6 months, 1 year, 5 years, 10 years - with a note, gift card, or ceremony.

3. Recruit Continually

Always look for good custodial workers even when you do not have an opening. The best place to find good custodial team members is by asking for referrals from current custodial team members. Be careful, though, to ask only your best custodial team members. Then, if they refer someone and that team member works out well, pay the referring team member a bonus for helping you find a good team member. Also, always be on the look-out for potential team members. For example, if you notice a hardworking, pleasant person at the gas station where you purchase gas or coffee, give them your card and ask them to contact you.

4. Outsource the Work

One of the best ways to deal with the headache associated with hiring, training, and retaining custodial team members is to simply let someone else handle it for you. By seeking out a qualified, reputable building service contractor, you can focus your efforts on tasks more important to your core mission.

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