

Employers list why teens can't keep jobs

The following article was printed in the California Business magazine:

By Terrence Cullinan

Teen-agers have a hard time finding employment and sometimes an even tougher time keeping it. Youth employment expert Bruce K. Barnes has studied the reasons 15- to 19-year-olds lose their jobs, and his findings may surprise some young workers.

In a concise and to-the-point research effort, Barnes finds that the often hard-working, sometimes hard-shirking teen-age employee gets fired mostly because of bad habits, and not for the reasons young people think they get terminated.

The employers Barnes studied agree almost unanimously that the real reasons young employees lose jobs are (in order):

1. Repeated lateness.
2. Several absences from work.
3. Friends visiting at work too often.
4. Not getting along with co-workers.
5. Not working fast enough.

Young employees who had been fired, on the other hand, thought the reasons were (again in order):

1. They lacked experience in the field.
2. They didn't have the right kind of training in school.
3. They didn't have a high enough educational level.
4. They weren't a member of the right union.
5. They weren't big or strong enough.

In fact, among nearly 100 employers involved in the study, Barnes found that the top 10 attributes sought in teen-age employees make no reference to experience, training, educational level, union affiliation or physical capability. The qualities employers look for:

1. Can follow directions.
2. Can complete tasks on his or her own.
3. Can arrive on time.
4. Shows enthusiasm toward the job.
5. Can adjust to changes on the job.
6. Can work toward a time schedule.
7. Shows self-control.
8. Can take responsibility.
9. Can work alone/unsupervised.
10. (Tie) Shows respect for tools and equipment in the workplace.

Can accept criticism.

The employers rate personal references far and away the most influential factor in deciding whether to hire an applicant. Educational references and references from previous employers rank very low. The personal characteristics rated highest are honesty, ambition, housekeeping, neatness and appearance.

When asked to comment on general problems shared by many prospective teen-age employees, nearly half the employers cite lack of basic communication skills, ineffective use of

feedback (teen-age workers often regard it as hurtful personal criticism), and inability to identify problems.

Apparently, it's the basics that hurt teen-age workers, not

any flamboyant excesses. Barnes found very little negative experience by employers with young employees using alcohol or drugs during work hours.

In a tight job market and a

difficult economy, this point may be effectively driven home to prospective and current teen-age employees: Attitude is yours to determine; aptitude can be developed on the job.

To schools they say: For productive students, teach them about good attitudes, reliable attendance and the impact a first-class effort can make.