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Best fit for work

Dear Jill,
I just began managing a group and it seems many of them are not the right fit for what they are doing. The tasks take longer than they should and we are always behind the deadlines. I think a few staffers might be happier if they switched roles. They are at the same salary level, so compensation is not an issue. Do you have any quick tips for identifying the best fit for a person's skill?

- P

ASK JILL



JILL MCGILLEN

Dear P,
First, you'll need to assess why the tasks take longer than they should.
In a recent study by LifeCare, Inc., a provider of healthcare services, 1,500 employees were asked to identify the biggest factors preventing them from fulfilling their job responsibilities. The results:

- 39 percent said they were overloaded and did not have sufficient time to finish tasks
- 12 percent said expectations were not clear to them
- 8 percent felt that compensation was not appropriate to their responsibility

First consider whether each of the above issues may be the root cause of low productivity. If you determine that your staff has been experiencing one or more of the hindrances reported by the 59 percent of workers above, try these methods:

Overload solutions

- Review resource needs and determine whether more staffers are needed or work needs to be prioritized differently or off-loaded. A quick way to do this:
- Ask your employees to list their top four job functions and the percentage of time they spend on each.
- Do their priorities match the department and organization goals? If not, then help them reprioritize their time to best fit the goals of your department and organization.
- After you have done this with each of your team members, analyze where you can streamline tasks and make sure there is no duplication.

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At Work With: Chris Minick, Farrier

By JoAnna Rodriguez



PHOTO BY ANNA MACKINNON

FITTING a horse with horseshoes and maintaining its hooves is a complex, strenuous and sometimes challenging business, reports Chris Minick, who has been a farrier for 35 years.

SPEAKING “equine” is an imperative part of Chris Minick’s work shoeing and caring for horses’ hoofs. That’s because knowing if a horse is frightened, impatient or just uneasy can make all the difference when it comes to his safety. “Just about any horse can injure me immediately,” the farrier said. “You have to constantly gauge the signals of the horse.” We talked with him about keeping horses’ feet healthy and why a good farrier is always in demand.

How did you get involved in the field of shoeing horses?

I was 20 and living on a 22,500-acre ranch. We had 50 head of horses that had to be shod and only old men to do the work. My father-in-law sent me to farrier school in Golden, Colo. When I graduated, I started making more in one hour than I did in an entire day on the ranch. Horse owners from up to 100 miles away started calling me to shoe their horses.

What kinds of horses do you shoe and for what activities?

I work on all kinds of horses, for everything from shows to the U.S. Park Service. I even trim some miniature donkeys.

What’s the process you go through when you’re working on the horses?

There’s so much involved that there are books written on it, but the basics are I take off the old shoes, trim the hoof, sole and frog, level off the entire foot and then decide what shoes will fit their feet. After I’ve shaped the shoes — either with the propane forge or cold if little adjustment is required — and I’m

certain the shoes are a good fit, I nail them on. The nails must be driven in just right or you can cause the horse a lot of pain or make them “nail bound,” where they will feel the pressure of the nail from displaced tissue.

I then cut off the excess horseshoe nails and clinch them down so that the shoes don’t come off. The nails are buffed clean and a sealant is applied to the finished hooves.

All of this happens in about an hour’s time for a complete shoeing. It’s very physical work. There are additional steps when I’m working with a new horse for the first time.

What’s involved in working with new horses?

Much of my time is spent evaluating how comfortable the horse is with me. I watch them walk, trot and sometimes canter to see if they favor a foot, if the feet land flat on the ground, how high they pick up their feet and how their old shoes are worn. I also evaluate the quality of workmanship of the previous farrier and look at whether or not the feet are matched. The evaluation process alone is very involved.

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Chris Minick

Job title: Farrier

Place of employment:
Farrier Art

Years on the job: 35



— AT WORK continued from page 1

I also consider how the owner will use the horse, the terrain it will be on and the long-term needs for keeping the horse sound and active. All of these things impact my work.

What are some of the rewards of your work?

I greatly enjoy the horses and interacting with their owners. Horses are always honest and genuine. I can tell immediately if they trust me, if they are beginning to get impatient, or if they want their foot back (before they jerk it back). When I leave a job, I feel good about myself and the work that I'm doing. I make a difference and a good income.

What are some of the challenges?

One of the biggest challenges I face is inheriting horses whose feet have been damaged by poor farrier work or neglectful owners. Owners often have unrealistic expectations of repairing the damage, which is why I have case studies of work that I've done. I can show clients the progress [of the foot] from when I took over to what we achieved in the end.

Another challenge is safety. Sometimes clients don't want to help you with a horse that's unruly, but if I'm going to work on their horse they need to be concerned about my safety. Just about any horse can injure me immediately and it's the ones who explode without warning that you need to be the most concerned about. They don't deliberately try to hurt me, but they hurt me trying to get away. Just last week I was stepped on by a 2,400-pound Belgian draft horse, which is a little more than double the size of your average riding horse. Two-thirds of her weight is in the front, so one foot is 800 pounds. I was lucky that she just got the side of my foot. I've learned to move pretty quickly and get out of the way.

What skills should a farrier have?

You must have genuine concern for horse's welfare and have a lot of patience. You need to be able to analyze a horse's gait and have a solid understanding of anatomy, blacksmithing, welding, metallurgy, pathology and nutrition, among other things. You also need good horsemanship skills because you can't work on a horse that's moving around. You need to understand why the behavior that's preventing you from doing your work is happening. Is it out of fear or because the horse is uncomfortable? The average horse is seven times larger than me, and you can just feel it when they are tense. You have to constantly gauge the signals of the horse.

What is your training and what schooling would you recommend?

I initially attended a three-month training program at a school in Golden,

Colorado. Since then, I've attended farrier clinics every year to learn about new techniques and technologies that can be applied to the craft.

When it comes to choosing a school, I'd recommend the Butler Professional Farrier School in Nebraska. You are held to a very high standard and will be prepared for every aspect of the business.

Is certification necessary?

No. Basically anyone could go buy rudimentary tools and call themselves a farrier. Unfortunately, people generally don't know good work from bad until it's too late, and the horse is hurt. There are probably 80 or 90 farriers in the North Bay, but only about 10 of us are certified by the American Farrier's Association. Getting certified is tough and when I took my hands-on horseshoeing test only two out of 17 people passed. There is also a written exam and a shoe-making test to get your certification.

What are some of the specializations in your field?

You can specialize in shoeing horses for races, endurance, dressage, hunter-jumper, Western and eventing.

You can also be an expert at things like dropped soles, club feet, laminitis, thrush eradication and just about any kind of custom work imaginable.

How much could a farrier hope to make?

The American Farrier's Journal estimated in 1998 that the average full-time farrier grossed \$55,723. Farriers on the East and West coasts gross about \$10,000 per year more than the rest of the country, but it's definitely possible to make more than that. I have a colleague with a multi-farrier practice who enjoys a \$200,000 plus income. In fact, farriers just out of school generally make more than veterinarians just out of school.

What's your advice to prospective farriers?

Read as much as you can about the business. I constantly pick up new books and subscribe to the American Farrier's Journal and the trade magazine Professional Farrier.

A good book to read is "Six-Figure Shoeing," by Dr. Doug Butler, who is the world's most renowned and recognized farrier educator. This book will truly help you determine whether you are suited to building a business as a professional farrier. It's a very down-to-earth business and a good farrier is always in demand. Also, it offers a flexible work schedule, and you can be your own boss.

For more information on Farrier Art call 415-302-6727 or visit www.farrierart.com. For more information on Butler Professional Farrier School visit www.butlerprofessionalfarrierschool.com.

ASK JILL

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Clear expectations

Clearly communicating expectations may be easier to fix. Simply being aware that you need to verbalize and codify what you expect employees to do is half of the solution. Ensure that instructions are clear, feedback is timely and specific, and proper training has taken place.

Compensation

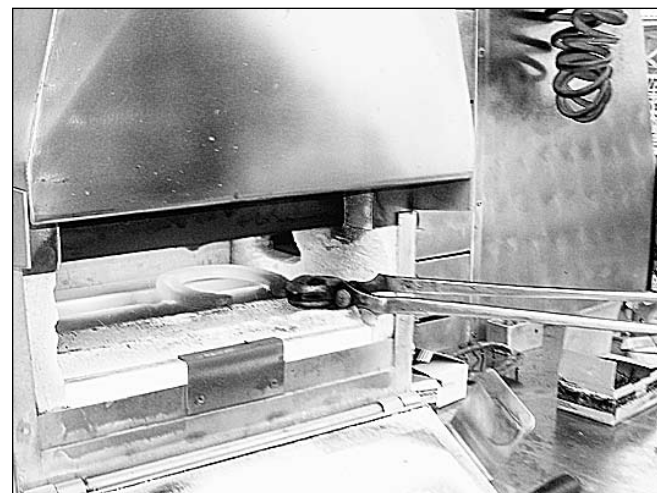
Evaluating salary would involve analysis of standard industry and job pay scales. Is your company paying competitively? If not, how can that be remedied?

If you should determine that your employees do not suffer from the above factors, look further to explain their less-than-stellar performance. Consider the following approaches:

- 1) Find those results that are satisfactory and then discover what the employee enjoyed about the job. Good results are clues to an employee's talents. Ask your employees to describe an ideal day on the job. What tasks and activities do they discuss? How can you translate that list to existing job roles and responsibilities?
- 2) Make a list of each employee's specific strong skills and match projects and processes that would leverage them best. Talk to peers of your staffers. What do they observe about their co-worker's strengths? Ask, "What does ___ do best? Who do you think is the best fit for X responsibility?" Since you are new, this feedback will help you look for consensus.
- 3) Understand weaknesses in order to leverage strengths. If you have a person who has difficulty following thorough with projects, he/she may be better suited in primarily front-end work such as development or something related to idea generation.
- 4) Before taking the big step of changing roles and responsibilities, allow your staffers to test-drive and shadow their co-workers. You might consider doing this with roles outside your department as well and invite other managers to do the same.

You are on the right track because workers do best what they enjoy most. Although not all responsibilities can be pleasurable, a mix within the work increases the likelihood of higher productivity.

Jill McGillen is president of NEXT TURN Consulting. Send questions to askjill@nextturnconsulting.com. For additional work advice go to www.nextturnconsulting.com.



PHOTOS BY ANNA MACKINNON

MINICK says that evaluating and filing horses' hooves, fitting new horseshoes and then nailing them to each hoof takes physical strength, patience and intuition.