“Help wanted.” “Now hiring.” “Apply within.” Posted on the doors of your restaurant or in the local newspaper, these notices used to draw a plethora of teen applicants for after school and summer jobs. Willing to work, teens were grateful to have a steady paycheck. Many operators are bemoaning the loss of those “good old days.”

“In general, there are fewer teens in the labor force [today],” said Bruce Grindy, chief economist with the National Restaurant Association. And based on long-term projections, those numbers will decline even more over the next 10 years. “If it continues along those trends, it will change the composition of the restaurant workforce,” he said.

Overscheduled, undercommitted
Several long-time operators have been challenged by the changes. “The availability [of teens] has shrunk,” noted Steve Schilling, owner of ZaZING! in North Prairie. “There are not as many people looking for work as there used to be.”

Teens are also leading much busier lives. “We try to hire people involved in sports and other activities, but now school activities are running way later than they used to,” he said, leading to a conflict between the employee’s schedule and the needs of the business. “There are times when you’ve got to say ‘no’ to the teen’s request for time off.”

Schilling believes that the weekly schedule should be a contract between the restaurant operator and the employee. “When I was working, I knew I had a responsibility to my employer and I didn’t break my promise,” he recalled. “I don’t think work is as high a priority for this group.”

Steve Davis, co-owner of Ardy and Ed’s Drive-In in Oshkosh, has similar concerns. “Their involvement in multiple activities makes it difficult to employ those kids,” he said.

Alex Newman, ProStart Coordinator with the Wisconsin Restaurant Association Education Foundation, agreed with both Schilling and Davis about the overscheduled teen. ProStart® is a two-year curriculum and mentoring program designed to introduce high school students to the skills needed for a career in the restaurant and foodservice industry. “Between educational duties and extracurriculars, there is a lot of pressure on students to be involved and have a strong resume built while in high school,” she said. Operators have found that these changes have caused the employment relationship to be turned on its head as the employees now tell the employer when they can and want to work.

While demographics and overscheduling certainly play a part in the reduced number of potential teen employees, there’s another factor driving their disappearance—the
culture. “Kids don’t have to work [today],” said Davis. “Parents are providing [them] phones and cars [so they aren’t as motivated to earn money].”

And when teens do work, many are missing a basic skill set that was ingrained in older employees. “Part of everyone’s job here is cleaning,” said Davis. Many of the younger employees report that their family has a cleaning service so they don’t have to do that at home. “We have to literally teach them what end of a broom to hold,” he said.

Teach, don’t tell

Davis’ need to teach his young employees the basics actually holds one of the answers to developing a successful employer/employee relationship, according to Chef Pat Weber, owner of Mise en Place, a Minnesota-based consulting service for restaurants, chefs and food related industries.

“The knee-jerk response by folks who work with or hire them is that the Millennials have no work ethic or they’re entitled,” he said. “So we have to get to the bottom of what motivates these folks.”

The “throw them into the fire” tactic that’s been employed in many restaurants does not work with this group of teens and young adults, noted Weber, who came up in the industry working under notoriously difficult French chefs. He recalled his experiences in the humiliating environment where competition was the great motivator.

But that type of environment doesn’t work with the Millennials, the label for the group that includes individuals from roughly age 16 up through early thirties. They want to be handled with “kid gloves” he said. They also “want to be part of a relationship that aligns with what’s important to them.”

Many operators believe that employees should either get it [quickly] or they won’t ever get it. To Weber, that’s an ineffective approach. “Everyone has the continued on page 20

Work Permit Rules

When employing teens, operators must abide by rules set by the Department of Workforce Development (DWD). Jim Chiolino, acting division administrator and director, Labor Standards Bureau, Equal Rights Division, Wisconsin DWD, reminds operators that they are required to have a work permit for all employees under the age of 18. “Any exceptions to work permit requirements don’t affect restaurants,” he said. And yes, a teen still needs a work permit even if the restaurant is family-owned.

These are the steps to obtain a work permit:
• Teens should get a letter of intent to hire from the operator.
• The minor has a parent sign the letter or write a letter and sign it.
• The letter is given to the work permit officer in the school or local community who will want proof of age in the form of a birth certificate, driver’s license, Social Security card or state-issued ID card.
• The minor pays a $10 fee in advance which is then reimbursed on the first paycheck.
And above all, make it fun. “If they’re not happy to be there with their friends and have fun at work, they won’t stay,” said Weber who encourages employers to create a “club” at work.

Some suggestions to create that club-centered work environment: use language that the kids use in training them. Create a culture that’s rewards-centered. Acknowledge the teens’ and the restaurant’s successes frequently, even daily. Teens thrive when recognized for their accomplishments.

Give teens a lot of feedback, said Weber. Check in with them and show genuine interest.

Yes, it’s a hassle to play nanny and Weber feels your pain. “It’s frustrating because I can sympathize with operators,” he said. “Not every operator has time to hold the hand of a teen worker as frequently as a teen would want them to.”

Yet keeping teens engaged and happy is often a matter between financial success or closing up shop. It costs an independent operator between $7,500 to $10,000 when they lose an employee, he said. These costs appear in morale, recruitment and training to name just a few areas.

---

**Teen Labor Law Basics**

14- and 15-year-olds (Wisconsin law mirrors federal law since 2011):

- June 1 through Labor Day, they may not work before 7:00 a.m. or after 9:00 p.m.
- They may not work more than 6 days per week.
- They may work up to 3 hours on school days and 8 hours on non-school days.
- They may work up to 18 hours during school weeks and 40 hours during non-school weeks.
- They must receive a 30-minute meal break if working more than 6 consecutive hours. The break may be unpaid.
- Labor Day through May 31, they may not work before 7:00 a.m. or after 7:00 p.m.

16- and 17-year-olds:

- State and federal laws do not limit the hours that minors 16 years of age or over may work, except that they may not be employed during hours of required school attendance. (So, once school is out they may work as much as they want—or you need.)
- If employed after 11:00 p.m., they must have 8 hours of rest between the end of one shift and the start of the next shift.
- They may work an unlimited number of hours in a day and in a week, but must be paid overtime for any hours over 10 in a day, even if they work less than 40 in the week.
- They must receive a 30-minute meal break if working more than 6 consecutive hours. The break may be unpaid.

Remember, the minimum wage for minors is $7.25 per hour—there is no teen minimum wage. However, you can pay the opportunity wage of $5.90 per hour for the first 90 consecutive calendar days of employment. On the 91st day, the wage must increased to $7.25 per hour.

Call the WRA Hotline Team at 800-589-3211 or email them at hotline@wirestaurant.org to get your teen labor questions answered.

The 579 Culver's restaurants in 24 states employ many teens. To improve employee retention, Culver's has structured training programs for new and experienced managers that cover a variety of managerial topics, according to Matt Klug, vice president of human resources for Culver Franchising System, Inc.

While Culver's does not have a dedicated program for youth employment, “specific attention is given to the importance of managers establishing positive team member relations, engagement, diversity and inclusion, communication and development,” he shared. “We … recognize the important role our restaurants play in providing growth and development opportunities for young team members, especially those whose first job is with us.”

Training takes time, said Weber, who suggested breaking tasks down into the bare bones basics or into incremental parts. Acknowledge their progress. Tell them how proud you are when they’ve learned a new skill, gotten faster or did something positive.

“Honor and acknowledge the small, little victories,” he said.
Constant turnover also means operators never get ahead. “The operator is not working on the business but working in the business by covering the shift,” he said. So hire for attitude and personality and teach the skills.

**Match job with teen’s interests, strengths**

Dave Flannery, owner of Apple Holler Family Farm located in Sturtevant, employs a lot of teens during the busy season in his restaurant and on the farm. “We’re very fortunate to get a lot of great kids,” he said.

Part of that might be due to Flannery’s employment protocol. He personally makes the final hiring decision. “I’m pretty picky about the kids we do hire,” he said.

When interviewing, he finds out what the candidate is interested in and tries to match the teen with a position that mirrors those interests. “We try to get them into jobs we think they’ll do well in,” said Flannery, who said he also makes it a point to address them by their first name.

One young hire, a budding videographer, made short videos which were then posted to Apple Holler’s website and on YouTube. One video contained testimonials that Flannery now uses to recruit new employees.

Also facing the same overcommitted teens as Schilling and Davis, “we bend over backwards to work with kids’ schedules,” said Flannery. “We don’t have hard and fast rules about them working 9 to 5, Monday through Friday.” He also hires extra employees to cover the occasional shift.

One important work rule Flannery insists on is the Golden Rule. “We have a lot of nice people working for us who treat the kids nicely,” he said. “I expect them [older employees] to treat the younger people nicely and be patient with them.”

continued on page 22
Hunting for scarce resources
With teen employees becoming rarer than ants in Antarctica, how do you find them? Referrals are seen as some of the most effective. “Good employees attract other good employees,” said Flannery. “I’m a firm believer in the best employees are those who are referred from within,” said Weber.

Newspaper ads, Facebook posts, signs in schools and other places where teens congregate are some of the methods operators use to recruit.

Apple Holler, who recruits all year long, sends a “Now Hiring” e-mail to its customer database with a link to the testimonial video.

Besides referrals, one source for employees is the ProStart program. The program trained about 4,400 students in the state last year, said Newman. Currently, 104 Wisconsin schools participate in ProStart with an additional 10 scheduled to come on board in the fall.

Victoria Bouras, a ProStart alumna, is currently working in the Food and

10 Tips to Manage Teenaged Employees
Provided by Pamela Kleibrink Thompson, recruiter, career coach, freelance writer and speaker. You can reach her at PamRecruit@q.com.

Chances are one in five that the next employee you hire will be the workplace enigma known as a teenager. By following 10 simple guidelines, Wisconsin restaurateurs can turn the teenaged assistant into a valuable team player.

1. Scout talent
The hiring stage is crucial. Restaurant owners searching for quality part-time workers should get involved with what teens do. Young people can demonstrate character, personality, creativity and responsibility in activities like sports or Scouting. Ask for referrals from coaches, high school faculty, current customers and current employees. High school vocational training programs and cooperative education programs are often excellent sources for high-caliber teen employees. Utilize social media tools when recruiting teens by posting the jobs online.

2. Invest time in interviewing
Don’t judge teenagers on appearance. Consider their personalities and the ways they express themselves. Look for a positive attitude and communication skills.

3. Set clear expectations and consistent, attainable goals
Make expectations, requirements and milestones clear, and be consistent with rewards or consequences. Because teens may not have any prior work experience, you have to define all aspects of the job including punctuality, scheduling and how to work with customers. Make sure they also know what you don’t want them to do on the job such as texting, talking on the phone and chatting with friends that stop by.

4. Communicate
A teen on his or her first job may be reluctant to ask questions or clarify instructions. Build a positive working relationship by communicating in clear, caring and respectful ways. Build credibility by dealing with each person one-on-one. Don’t talk down to teens or treat them as children. Be fair and consistent. Avoid showing favoritism.

5. Supervise closely
Reinforce directives and follow up assignments. Checklists and employee manuals that state expectations are helpful.

6. Criticize constructively
Avoid being overly critical. Use tact when correcting. Reward the positive rather than criticize the negative. It never hurts to say “You’re doing a good job and I want you to know I know that.” Build employees’ self-esteem by telling them what they are doing well.

7. Cross train
Understand that teens will likely have other commitments, such as school, that will affect their availability. Be flexible in scheduling work hours. Scheduling can be affected by laws, work permits and homework or social functions which may take precedence over work. To prepare for a high absenteeism rate, train all employees in every task in your operation. Cross-training helps build teamwork, a sense of responsibility and loyalty and reduces friction.

8. Vary tasks and motivate by adding more responsibilities or conferring a title
If a teen employee demonstrates aptitude, let him or her participate more. You may be surprised by your employees’ performance when you entrust them with more responsibility. For example, a teenager who aspires to be a web designer can help with your website. Teens provide another perspective and are often creative.

9. Take time to coach
The teen worker sometimes acts like a child but wants to be treated as an adult. You are more than an employer—you’re also a teacher. Coach teens so they understand that the customer comes first.

10. Cheer them on
Working with a teenager can be a mutually beneficial experience—a manager with a positive attitude will gain the respect and cooperation needed from the teen worker. If the teen’s first supervisor is a positive role model, the teen will become a valuable team player—remember you have the opportunity to influence the teenager’s work attitude for the rest of his or her life.
Beverage Department at the Coral Beach and Tennis Club in Bermuda. She attends Cornell University’s School for Hotel Administration in New York.

In an e-mail to Newman, Bouras discussed her thoughts on being a Millennial in the industry. “With the hospitality industry being so people-oriented, one has to constantly reflect on how the guest’s needs can be met to ensure that the guest has a positive experience,” wrote Bouras. “This service-minded focus is one that benefits one’s professional or personal life, both inside and outside the service industry.”

When asked how she prefers to be managed at a job, Bouras wrote: “I actually do best under authoritative management styles. I thrive in a tightly controlled working environment with clearly defined rules and expectations.”

Two other things are important to Bouras: “a manager being willing to listen to my suggestions for ways the restaurant can improve” and “receiving feedback on how I personally can improve my job performance both informally throughout the normal workday, and formally through a performance review.”

Kaylee Court of Pulaski, another ProStart alumnus, wrote: “When I am on the job, I like to be able to have some authority. I like to be able to make my own decisions on how to handle situations.

“I love to be able to ask questions and learn from my managers and supervisors,” she added. Court also likes to “feel valued” at a job that she has worked hard in.

From her managers, Court wants direction. “Getting delegated tasks to complete is how I prefer to work,” she said. “I also appreciate a well-organized manager that knows how things are to be completed and in what time frame.”

With teens forming the backbone of help during the busy season in many restaurants, it’s imperative that operators know how to get the best out of them. WR