

Hiring employees who entertain is your best bet for a happy customer

By Kathy Bergstrom

Training expert Beth Standlee has estimated it costs at least \$1,500 for an entertainment center to hire and train a new employee.

If the employee doesn't work out, your investment goes down the drain. That's the direct cost, but "the other thing you can't measure is if they don't work out it probably means that they weren't giving good customer service, so what damage did they do to your relationship with your customers?" she said.

There are strategies rink owners can use to find the best employees and avoid making these costly hiring mistakes, Standlee said.

Standlee is owner and chief executive officer of TrainerTainment, a Fort Worth, Texas-based company that specializes in providing training for family entertainment centers and other hospitality related businesses.

Rink owners looking to hire an employee should start off by making a list of the characteristics of their ideal employee. If that's too hard, Standlee suggested rink owners envision the best employee they ever had and write down what qualities made that employee rise to the top.

Suggestions might be someone with

a good work ethic, friendliness and ability to work on a team.

Start the hiring process seeking those qualities and don't settle for less, Standlee said.

One of the questions Standlee tells business owners to ask potential employee is how they motivate themselves when they have to do something they don't want to do. The answer is important, she said.

"You can't motivate others. You've got to hire motivated people. You have to hire people who are self-motivated," she said. That's one of the reasons Standlee has found the best young employees are those who are involved in extracurricular activities.

Those who are involved in band, sports, choir or theater are accustomed to working on a team. "It seems like the busier kids know how to get more things done, and they're a little bit more reliable," she said, noting that band students tend to be disciplined and those involved in theater are good candidates to host birthday parties.

Hiring someone who's already busy means rinks will need to have more flexible schedules, but a solution might be hiring a few more part-time employees who work fewer hours each week, Standlee said.

Rather than trying to weed out the



TrainerTainment CEO Beth Standlee

best candidates from a stack of applications, Standlee advocated for rink owners to try an open interview process similar to an audition.

In the process, candidates are brought in at the same time and go through a series of activities together. TrainerTainment has several activities that include asking the candidates to have their "Idol moment," and use that time to let the rink operator know who they are.

Some applicants will simply introduce themselves and talk about their activities, others might sing or even juggle. "I'm looking for personality," Standlee

explained. "You can teach them the job. You can't change their personality."

Another suggested activity is placing several tasks, like singing a song or telling a joke, in an envelope and requiring each candidate to pick a task and perform it.

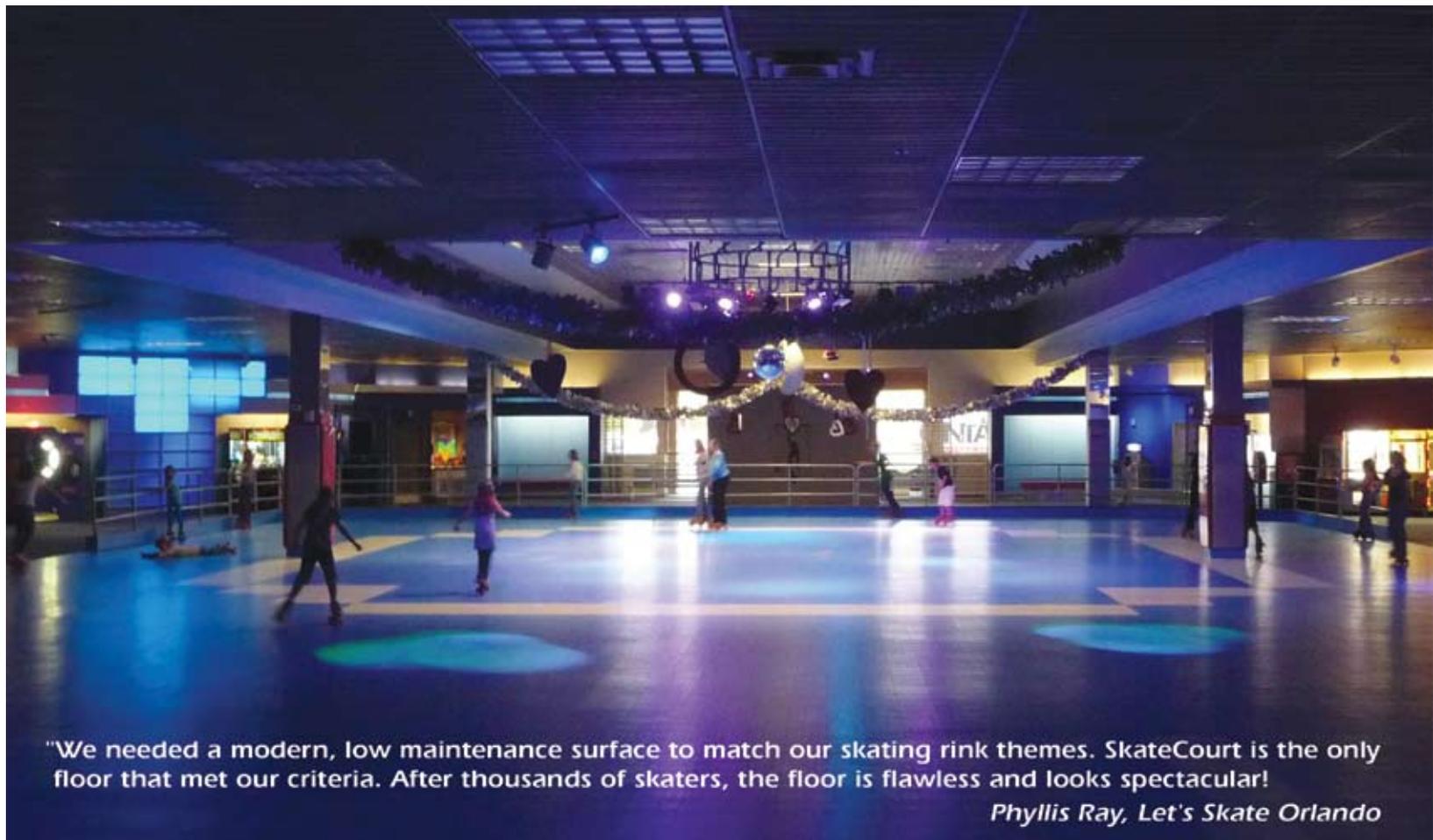
"The point is when you get a job you may be asked to do something that you don't know how to do or you may not want to do," she said. "We want to see how engaged they want to be."

Other recommended activities are a teamwork test and role-playing situations that can happen at a skating center. Again, Standlee explained rink operators should look for people who are friendly, can smile, are energetic and want to be part of a team.

Standlee's process has a numerical scoring system, so each candidate is assigned a score on each activity, and the highest scorers are hired. That takes the emotion out of hiring and allows rink operators to make the best decision, she said.

The process isn't any more time consuming than conducting individual interviews with multiple candidates, Standlee contended, and rink owners should realize improved results.

She stressed that rink owners should continue to strive for that ideal employee, and not feel they have to settle because they are offering minimum wage.



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