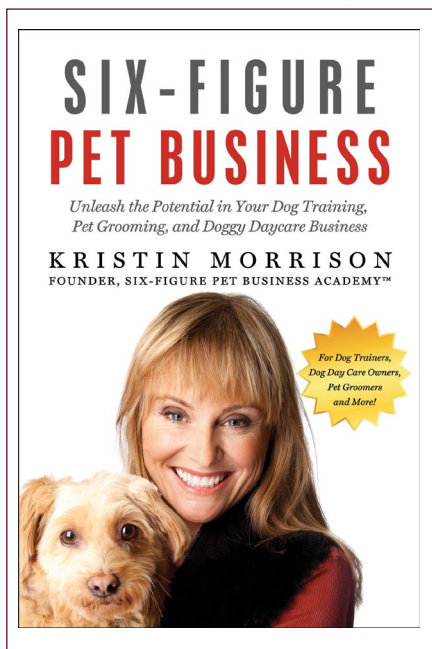


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# You, the Employer: Secrets to Finding, Working with, and Keeping Great Staff Members



This hiring handbook is an excerpt from

Kristin Morrison's book for pet business owners:

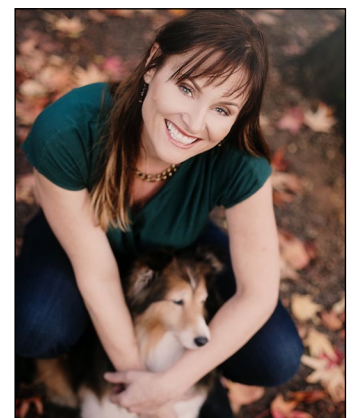
*Six-Figure Pet Business: Unleash the Potential in Your Dog Training, Pet Grooming, and Doggy Daycare Business*

You can purchase the eBook online at:

[www.SFPBacademy.com](http://www.SFPBacademy.com)

This resource is for pet sitters, dog trainers, pet groomers, dog walkers and other pet business owners. It may be shared FREELY without alteration. After all, the more pet business owners who are successful in business, the better for us all!

**Kristin Morrison** started her pet care company in 1995, and it grew to be one of the largest pet care companies in California before she sold it in 2013. Kristin provides business coaching for thousands of pet sitters, dog walkers, dog trainers, and pet groomers across the United States, Canada, the UK and Australia. In 2008, she founded Six-Figure Pet Sitting Academy™ and Six-Figure Pet Business Academy™ providing coaching, webinars, and business products for pet business owners. Kristin wrote the books *Six-Figure Pet Sitting* and *Six-Figure Pet Business* which can be found in print on Amazon and in eBook format on her websites: [www.SFPBacademy.com](http://www.SFPBacademy.com) and [www.SFPBacademy.com](http://www.SFPBacademy.com). Kristin Morrison can be contacted at: [Success@SFPBacademy.com](mailto:Success@SFPBacademy.com) or [Thrive@SFPBacademy.com](mailto:Thrive@SFPBacademy.com).



Kristin Morrison, Founder of  
Six-Figure Pet Business Academy™  
and  
Six-Figure Pet Sitting Academy™

## You, the Employer:

### Secrets to Finding, Working with, and Keeping Great Staff Members

If you are against hiring people to help you in your pet business, I want to let you know right off the bat that it will be challenging to create a six-figure pet business without hiring the staff to support you.

If you have fear and trepidation about hiring staff members to work for you, realize that you are normal... so welcome to the club! Everyone that is new to hiring for their pet businesses feels nervous and often very anxious before they hire.

I did.

But I pushed past my fear because I knew that I could not run the kind of successful business that I wanted to create without hiring people to work for me.

Why?

Because I am only one person. I can't do it all.

And more importantly, I don't want to do it all. In fact, when I set my goal to run my business differently, I discovered a simple truth that set me free.

That truth was: Though I LOVE animals and though I started this business out of my deep and utter love for animals, I got a little tired of caring for animals seven days a week.

#### **I realized that:**

- **I wanted to have time for myself.**
- **I wanted to have the option of not working if/when I didn't want to.**
- **I wanted to be able to work *on* my business instead of always *in* my business.**
- **I wanted to be able to stay at home in bed if I was sick.**
- **I wanted to be able to go on vacation and *make money while I was away.***

When I discussed commitment earlier in this book and suggested that you would have to dedicate yourself entirely to your business for a year (or for the time frame you felt was appropriate for you in order to create business success), I did not mean that you can't delegate some of the tasks of your pet business to other people who can help you. It will very likely be impossible to grow your business without doing so.

Here's what you want to consider before hiring:

- 1) Figure out the holes/gaps in your schedule, so you can know what you need.
- 2) If you are hiring because *you* need time off (and not just because you are getting more calls than you can handle), then figure out your ideal schedule compared to what you are currently working. Knowing that information will allow you to identify those gaps, so you can fill them.

Unless you are completely burned out, change your schedule slowly. Take Mondays off and keep your Tuesday through Friday appointments, or take T/TH off and keep M/W/F. This will help clients adjust too as well as making a smooth financial transition for your business as you shift from you doing all the work to paying your staff to do it.

Once you've decided to hire staff, I strongly suggest you create or buy an application packet. I've created the Application Packet for Pet Sitters and Dog Walkers™ and many dog walkers and pet sitters have found this tool invaluable. You can create a similar packet for your business, or to save time and effort, you can buy an already developed application packet from the Six-Figure Pet Business Academy™ website, so you don't have to reinvent

the wheel. This packet was invented by me in 1997, and it has made hiring so easy that I wouldn't (and haven't) hired pet sitters and dog walkers without it since creating it years ago. And here's the thing: you can easily customize it to adapt to *any* type of pet business.

I will share what's included in the Application Packet for Pet Sitters and Dog Walkers™, what it does and why it is one of the most important items required to hire great people, so you can get a better sense of what you'll need before doing any advertising, interviewing and hiring for your pet business:

**1) Cover sheet explaining that applicants will need to fill out this packet and mail it back to you. (No matter what pet service you offer, you want to hire people who follow instructions.)**

**2) Job descriptions and pay rates for each job. The three job descriptions that are enclosed in my packet: dog walker, overnight pet sitter, am/pm pet visitor. (You should create job descriptions and pay scales for the positions you need before doing any hiring. You'll avoid headaches down the road. Run an Internet search for "job description for" and insert the type of position you need to fill. This will give you a head start and eliminates the need for you to start from scratch.)**

**3) Basic application standard to any job.**

**4) Application specific to pet sitting with pet sitting-related questions. (You can easily alter this to accommodate your particular pet business needs.)**

**5) Walk schedule: See at a glance when this person is available or not available to make sure it matches your needs and see areas they are available to cover. (Again, this is easy to replicate for other pet businesses, and you'll want to know when your prospective employees are and are not available to work.)**

**6) Pet sitter schedule: See dates for which they are already booked, holidays that they are available for, and areas that they are willing to cover.**

You can create your own application packets and other forms or the Six-Figure Pet Business Academy™ creates hiring and other business tools for other types of pet businesses.

### ***Six-Figure Success Tip:***

*Before you can achieve your ideal schedule, you need to make sure that hiring works financially for you. How do you do that?*

*Determine how much you would lose compared to the gain by giving your 'assignments' away to staff. Dog walkers, trainers, groomers and pet photographers typically split the revenue with staff for taking specified appointments. If you are paying your staff 50% of a \$20 service, you might lose \$10 and gain \$10. Determine that if nothing changed (i.e. no more new client calls for a while) whether or not you can manage to maintain a solvent business on an ongoing basis after giving up those assignments.*

*Keep in mind that these assignments, for certain pet businesses, include drive time to and from the job(s) in addition to the time for the service, so you automatically gain that time which can translate into more money if you use that energy and time you would have spent doing the job to focus on marketing and customer service efforts and other income-producing activities to create new business.*

### ***Six-Figure Success Tip:***

Here is a link that will give you a limited-time discount for some [hiring tools for pet business owners](#).

Once you have your application packet ready, you'll want to go ahead and place an ad on Craigslist. My experience has been that Craigslist is the best place to advertise for help.

Why?

You get a vast pool of people to consider. Don't worry about getting too many applicants. Your Application Packet will help weed the bad applicants out and bring the good applicants to your attention.

Post your ad in the employment category on Craigslist under etc. jobs, P/T jobs and/or under domestic under the category "gigs." Please note that in some cities, Craigslist charges a fee for job ads but not for "gigs" ads. You will probably get more responses under "etc. jobs," so post there first.

The screenshot shows the Craigslist website for Los Angeles. The main navigation bar includes 'community', 'housing', 'jobs', 'personals', 'discussion forums', and 'services'. The 'jobs' category is expanded to show sub-categories: 'accounting+finance', 'admin / office', 'arch / engineering', 'art / media / design', 'biotech / science', 'business / mgmt', 'customer service', 'education', 'food / bev / hosp', 'general labor', 'government', 'human resources', 'internet engineers', 'legal / paralegal', 'manufacturing', 'marketing / pr / ad', 'medical / health', 'nonprofit sector', 'real estate', 'retail / wholesale', 'sales / biz dev', 'salon / spa / fitness', 'security', 'skilled trade / craft', 'software / qa / dba', 'systems / network', 'technical support', 'transport', 'tv / film / video', 'web / info design', 'writing / editing', '[ETC]', and '[ part-time ]'. The 'gigs' section is highlighted with a red arrow, and the 'domestic' sub-category is also highlighted with a red arrow.

In addition to placing an ad on Craigslist, you can also consider asking your local Humane Society or animal shelter about its volunteers. Maybe one of them is looking for a pet-related job. You may also find another pet professional who's interested in working for someone else rather than running her own business, especially one who finds the administrative and marketing side of the business to be too challenging.

Be very clear in your ad about exactly what you need: (dog walker, pet groomer, trainer, etc.) where (what city?) and when (T/TH, between the hours of 11 a.m. and 2 p.m.). You also want to spell out the pay rate in your ad as well as clearly stating the job expectations for positions like dog walkers that can be very part-time.

I pay my staff 50 percent of what I charge clients. If you are paying too much, you won't make a profit; if too little, then you won't attract quality people to work for you.

## **What to do after you place your ad:**

Okay, now your ad is up, and you are getting responses.

The first step is to weed out the ones who seem unsuitable right away.

### ***Six-Figure Success Tip:***

*Email or mail those particular applicants the Application Packet and have them MAIL the packet back to you.*

*Why have the applicants mail the packets back? It's more effort for the applicants; therefore, you'll get a higher caliber of staff responding simply by noticing who mails the packet back and who doesn't.*

*I have noticed that if I send out ten packets, I might get five back. Of those five, typically only one or two will probably be someone I want to hire. But I've saved myself many hours by not interviewing unsuitable applicants.*

Do you need to respond to everyone? It's nice if you can, but if you get 100 to 200 emails in response to your ad, then obviously you can't respond to everyone *and* run your business! So if you have received a large response to your ad, you need only respond to those that seem like they might be a good fit.

Review the packets at your leisure (one of the many benefits of using the Application Packet).

As you are reviewing the Application Packet, it's important to really pay attention to whether applicants followed instructions that you set forth. For example, in the Application Packet for Pet Sitters and Dog Walkers™, one question on the packet is: "List three words to describe why you would make a great pet sitter or dog walker." If they write three sentences to that question, I know they probably are not a good fit!

Remember: you want someone who follows directions in written form. (Think about written instructions your customers may send via email and how important those are to follow!)

Of the application packets that are mailed to you, there may be a couple applicants who really stand out. You may want to "Google" the applicants to see if anything untoward about them populates on the Internet. Remember, they will be representing your company. Call those applicants who really stand out above the rest for an interview.

## **Face-to-face interview:**

Where to meet? A coffee shop or a park is a good meeting place for interviewing potential staff members. Pet business owners who have stand alone shops and are groomers or operate a dog day care will naturally want to interview applicants at the business location. Note the applicant's punctuality. If the applicant is late, consider the reason. Also, keep in mind that an interview can be stressful. A few nerves are normal, so allow the applicant a few minutes to adjust. Start with small talk to create a friendly atmosphere.

Remember:

- Have dogs/cats at interview. See how they are with hyper dogs—always a good test!
- Pay attention to initial impression.
- Review the packet with them and review their availability compared to your needs.

Ask probing questions that are appropriate for your pet business. If you are hiring a groomer, you'll want to know about their training and if, for example, they have a fear of a particular breed. Pet photographers need to

ask about equipment, review a portfolio and learn whether or not applicants have a preference for dogs or cats. You will certainly want to ask about credentials and references if you are hiring a dog trainer.

While they are answering your questions, pay attention to your own impressions in addition to their answers. How do you feel around this person? Do you feel relaxed? Your clients will too. Anxious? Your clients will too!

Often pet business owners who call me for coaching regarding the hiring process are shocked to learn that I don't ask a lot of questions of potential applicants, and here's why:

Anyone can answer questions correctly!

It's up to you to *discern* whether this person is actually trustworthy and able to do the job.

- Are they personable? You probably want to hire someone who likes animals *and* people. If applicants say "I like dogs more than people because dogs don't talk back" that's always a yellow flag for me because I need staff members who can relate well to both pets and people and put my clients at ease.
- Do they present well? Are they dressed neatly, etc.? Hair combed?
- Do they look you in the eye when they speak?
- Do they seem confident and comfortable but not cocky?

After you've asked a few questions, you'll probably have an idea if you want to hire them or not.

**If they are a definite no:** Let them know that you have other interviews and that this is just a short interview to get to know them. Be sure to call them back in a few days and let them know you've hired someone else. Destroy their application packet and let them know you have destroyed it as it contains personal and private information on it.

**If they are a good fit:** Go over your Welcome Packet with them which contains:

- Policy and procedure list
- Client interview sheets (if they will be meeting with clients)
- Checklists and other relevant paperwork.
- Staff contract with non-compete clause to be signed.
- Any other paperwork that will be necessary for them to have or be aware of before they start the job.

## **Background checks before hiring?**

I don't do background checks but it doesn't mean you shouldn't. I've hired so many people throughout the years that I've really learned to trust my intuition. The Application Packet for Hiring Pet Sitters and Dog Walkers™ really, really helped me weed out the bad ones. Plus the application contains the question: Can we do a background/criminal check on you? Most everyone who answers "yes" is going to know they have nothing to hide. Be certain to include this question on your own application.

However, if you are new to hiring or you are nervous about hiring, then you do want to get a background check on an applicant before hiring. You should also check your insurance policy and bonding agreement. Either or both of them may require background checks. Contact your pet business association, and they can guide you on the best background check company.

You will also have to decide if you'll hire someone as an independent contractor (IC) or an employee. They are two distinct classifications. According to the IRS, "It is critical that you, the business owner, correctly determine whether the individuals providing services are employees or independent contractors. Generally, you must withhold income taxes, withhold and pay Social Security and Medicare taxes, and pay unemployment tax on wages paid to an employee. You do not generally have to withhold or pay any taxes on payments to independent contractors."

There are pros and cons to each classification. Independent contractors require less paperwork on your part and you're off the hook when it comes to withholding taxes. ICs must be responsible to pay their own taxes. However, you cannot tell them what to do, and it's possible they'll take your clients. While you can ask them to sign a non-compete when you hire them, that is not a sure-fire guarantee and can lead to a drawn out legal battle. On the other hand, employees are under your control. They may not legally take your clients, but it is generally more expensive to have employees, and they come with a lot more paperwork. Speak with your accountant to determine which classification makes the most sense for your business. It's not a choice you should make without professional advice.

## **Welcome aboard**

Provide new staff members with your promotional shirts/uniform and also consider providing them with a customized bag to carry supplies, apron, leashes, etc.

Review your policies and procedures, and your first hire means that those should be in written format and spelled out in detail. Be clear about smoking, dress code, gum chewing, door locking, and general conduct as well as how each appointment should be conducted.

Also, review your own insurance policy to be certain you understand exactly what is... and isn't... covered regarding your staff members.

## **Accompanying staff members on client interviews or during first-time appointments**

I recommend those business owners (like dog walkers, groomers, photographers and trainers) who are new to hiring go to at least the first three client interviews or appointments with their staff. You can do some role playing with your staff members prior to the first client meeting. This will help your staff (and you) feel comfortable when they are providing the actual service. Start by having her play the role of the client with you in the role of the service provider and then reverse it.

When you are at the client meeting, you can handle the initial introduction, but then allow your staff member to take charge. Have your staff member carry the clipboard containing the relevant paperwork and have her ask the necessary questions of the client.

After the third appointment or when you and the staff member both feel comfortable, allow her to go by herself. This will save you time to put your energy into revenue-producing activities. And trying to find time to schedule three different participants for a meeting can be very challenging.

## **Monitoring staff members**

Have staff members call you before and after the client interview appointment. (This is obviously unnecessary to those pet entrepreneurs operating dog day care centers or providing grooming from a central location.) This way, you can get the date/time stamp on your business phone and can track the time that pet professional spent at each job. You can adjust the check-in time and frequency as you gain confidence in your staff member.

For those pet business owners with staff members providing service at the clients' homes, you may also want to stop by to see how things are going. Some pet business owners who are very nervous about new staff do that and find it helps alleviate any fear or distrust they might have.

Client questionnaires will help you get feedback on how your new staff member is doing. It's often easier for clients to write out their feedback than to pick up the phone to let you know about

### ***Six-Figure Success Tip:***

*Always send a client questionnaire out to ALL clients but especially new clients. Make it simple for clients to mail it back by including a self-addressed stamped envelope. Or email it to clients and ask them to email it back by a certain date.*

their experience using your new staff member. Keep it simple for them and for you! My experience has proven that clients are apt to actually fill out and mail back a written questionnaire than they are to complete an online questionnaire, especially if you include a self-addressed stamped envelope along with your questionnaire.

Once staff has been with your company for a while, I recommend just having them call when they do their first visit or overnight and then when they do their final visit or overnight for that particular client.

You may also want to stop by the client's home to see how things are going. Some pet sitting business owners who are very nervous about new staff do that and find it helps alleviate any fear or distrust they might have.

A final note about the questionnaire: Share the feedback, both positive and negative, with your staff. The positive feedback will keep your staff motivated and the negative feedback will get them back on the right track.

### **If clients complain about your staff member**

Call the staff member to get his side before assuming that he did something wrong. Always give him the benefit of the doubt before you've assumed the client is right. I've often found that my sitters had a good reason for doing what was perceived by the client as "wrong." If I had accused the sitter without having all the facts, I might be minus a good sitter and a client!

However, if a new staff member *did* do something wrong on the first, second or third job, pay attention to that. Usually people do their best on the first, second and third jobs. If a staff member is doing a poor job on the first, second or third job, she might not be the right fit for your company. Pay attention! Hiring is like dating; people prove who they are in the first few meetings. It's up to you to pay attention.

You'll save yourself stress down the road when you honestly assess the applicants in those first few minutes of meeting for an interview and how they perform in first few jobs you give them.

If staff did something wrong, honestly assess *your* role in the error.

- Did YOU leave something out in your instruction to them?
- Did you fail to educate or train your staff members properly?
- Where were you not entirely clear with them about something?

### **How to keep your staff**

Here are some tips to keep your staff happy and content and working with you for years:

- Gratitude: Express it! If you received a positive client questionnaire, read it to that person and offer thanks. Feeling appreciated is the number one reason why many people stay in jobs.
- Surprise staff members by rewarding them with a random paid day off.
- Money: Give a raise without being asked for it.
- Give unexpected gifts like massage certificates to your key people when they least expect it.
- On your website (under FAQs) or in company literature, include the statement "tips are not expected but are appreciated" to encourage more tips from your clients.
- If you charge a holiday fee, give staff half of the holiday fee.
- Give holiday gifts: Money to your crucial staff members, coffee cards or bookstore cards to those other staff members



- Start saving now for your staff holiday gifts.
- Consider monthly staff meetings to discuss problems and solutions, marketing ideas and to share kudos from clients. (Remember the cardinal rule about managing people: Reward in public; reprimand in private.)

~ Action Step~

If you want to hire staff and find that you are afraid of hiring people, write down all of the fears that you have that stand in the way of hiring.

Look at all the reasons why you DO want to hire staff members and write them down.

Compare both lists above and determine if the benefits would in any way outweigh the fears you may have. If you have fear about hiring, realize that thousands of pet business owners before you have and do hire people every day. You are not alone. Be willing to give up the fears to pursue your dream of having a business and a life!

~Action Step~

Look at this week's or next week's schedule and determine what day(s) you need to hire someone to work for you so that you can get a well-needed break.

~Action Step~

Determine your hiring deadline and begin breaking the hiring process down in manageable actions to begin the hiring process today.

~ Action Step ~

Create your own application packet to use as a hiring tool. You may find you can easily alter the hiring tools I created for pet sitters and dog walkers for your particular pet service business. Here is the link for all of the Six-Figure Pet Business Academy™ hiring tools for pet sitters including the Application Packet for Pet Sitters and Dog Walkers™: [www.SFPBacademy.com](http://www.SFPBacademy.com)

~Action Step~

Be willing to look at what is not working with your staff and make changes or let difficult staff members go. Determine if any of your staff members are burned out and figure out when/how to give them a break.

~ Action Step~

Commit to mail out client questionnaires to new clients who have used new staff members this week, so you can get honest feedback about how they are doing. Be sure to include a self-addressed stamped envelope, so it's easy for clients to mail the form back to you.

~ Action Step~

Begin some of the recommended suggestions for keeping your valuable business asset - your staff.

### **Six-Figure Success Tip:**

*Know when to tell your staff they need a break—on some level being a boss is a bit like being a mom or dad. Kids don't always know when they are tired—when staff gets cranky, it usually means it's time to give them a break. Don't let your staff run themselves into the ground. You'll lose your staff that way. They are valuable to your business and your lowered stress level, so YOU can get a well-needed break. Protect them by creating a schedule that allows them to have well-needed time off.*

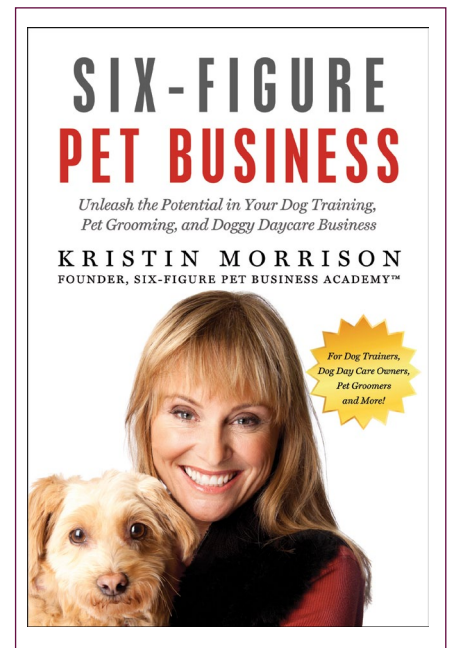
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