



Hiring at Huckle Buckle Beanstalk: Not All Fun and Games

Introduction¹

David Brown sat at his desk in the stock room of his toy store, Huckle Buckle Beanstalk, looking at the three résumés in front of him. Brown leafed through his notes, sighed, and set the paperwork back down. He needed a new store manager, and these three résumés were his top choices from the applicant pool—the people he was about to bring in for interviews. Each of these candidates offered a different mix of skills and experience, and he hoped he would have the unusual luxury of having one rise to the top in the afternoon interviews. He had fired his previous store manager just over a month earlier for theft, and he knew that the business would suffer if he had to continue managing the store himself. The critical ordering season for the holidays was coming up, and he couldn't afford to have his attention divided. He felt the pressure to find the right person, and soon.

Growing a Toy Store

Brown and his wife Susan had opened Huckle Buckle Beanstalk in 1996 in Staunton, Virginia. They named the store for one of their favorite childhood games.² Theirs was a specialty store, and by carrying certain high-end specialty toys along with select mass-market items, Huckle Buckle Beanstalk had managed to survive when many independent toy retailers had gone out of business due to competition from national big-box retailers. The store had been staffed mainly by family in the early years: the Browns managed the store and their two teenage children helped out.

The Browns had been fortunate because the business had grown steadily since 1996. Even in the face of the 2008 recession, it had remained profitable. As it grew and their children moved on, the Browns had hired additional sales staff. In 2002, Susan left the store to return to her career in medical sales, and the Browns hired an assistant store manager to help manage the floor. As the business expanded, Brown needed to focus more of his time on the back office: keeping the finances, placing product orders, and marketing the business. In 2007, the Browns hired a full-time store manager to tend to front-of-house issues—managing the sales team, opening and closing the register, keeping the store stocked and tidy, managing customer relationships, updating displays, and so on. This allowed Brown to focus his time on strategy, growing the business, and office management. By the start of 2010, the store had a staff of six plus Brown (see **Exhibit 1** for staffing levels and **Exhibit 2** for staffing budget).

¹ Resilience Education, a nonprofit founded at the Darden School of Business, provides high-quality, customized education for vulnerable populations. For more information, contact info@resilience-education.org.

² Huckle Buckle Beanstalk, also called Hide the Thimble, was a children's game. For details, see the Project Gutenberg e-book of Jessie H. Bancroft, *Games for the Playground, Home, School and Gymnasium* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1909), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/25660/25660-h/25660-h.htm> (accessed Mar. 2, 2020).

A Difficult Decision

While reconciling the finances in March 2010, Brown realized that the deposits for February didn't add up. He eventually discovered that the store manager, Jeff Gibson, had "borrowed" \$5,000 from the daily receipts over the course of the month. Brown was distraught. After working together for three years, he had come to trust and rely on Gibson—although Brown did the monthly reconciliation of the store's finances, Gibson was responsible for reconciling the cash registers and making the daily deposit.

With someone he trusted checking the registers on a daily basis and making the deposits, Brown hadn't felt a need to more closely check the daily receipts. When confronted, Gibson said he was going to pay the cash back and had planned to do so before Brown noticed the month-end discrepancy in the bank accounts. Brown didn't understand why Gibson hadn't come to him for help if he needed money. Deciding he had no choice in the current situation, Brown fired Gibson on the spot and reported the theft to the police.

The store's employees were a relatively close-knit group, and the change had shocked them. The combination of the theft and firing put everyone on edge. One sales associate quit, saying he didn't think Brown should have called the police without giving Gibson a chance to repay the money. He characterized Brown's actions as "uncaring and disrespectful." The assistant manager had been filling in by working some additional hours since Huckle Buckle Beanstalk was now two employees down, but they were not interested in becoming the permanent store manager.

For the past three years, Brown had relied on Gibson to keep the store running smoothly. The tension among the remaining staff and the demands on Brown's time made finding someone to be the new store manager essential.

Different Choices

The number of responses Brown got from the job advertisement in the local paper and on local websites was impressive, but Brown was disappointed with the applicants' quality. Very few had the combination he was looking for: experience managing people, strong customer service skills, and a retail background. Three candidates rose to the top of his list (see **Exhibit 3** for résumés):

1. James Anderson had considerable experience in retail, having worked in two large department stores. Brown wondered if his little toy store would be an engaging place for Anderson to work. He also wanted to know why Anderson was choosing to leave a larger store. He was concerned about his salary requirements and made a note to discuss that during the interview.
2. Elizabeth Baughan had worked at Huckle Buckle Beanstalk for the past three years as a sales associate. She had returned to retail after staying at home to raise her children and was a good employee. She knew the store and the people, which could be both a benefit and a liability. Brown knew she was friendly with Gibson and wasn't sure how she felt about the firing.
3. Candice Turner was a nontraditional candidate with no retail experience. She was clearly a capable manager and had strong experience working with people in a customer service capacity, but it wasn't clear if those skills would translate into success at the toy store, and her lack of retail experience gave Brown some pause.

Brown hoped his decision to bring these three in for an interview would pay off. He really wanted to find his new store manager before the end of the day.

Exhibit 1

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Huckle Buckle Beanstalk Staffing Levels
(start of year)

Year	Owner	Manager	Assistant Manager	Sales Associate
2005	1	0	1	3
2006	1	0	1	3
2007	1	1	0	4
2008	1	1	0	5
2009	1	1	1	3
2010	1	1	1	4

Source: All exhibits created by author.

Exhibit 2

Hiring at Huckle Buckle Beanstalk: Not All Fun and Games

Current Staff Compensation Budget

Title	Compensation	Benefits
Owner	\$55,000/year	
Manager	\$34,000/year	Health insurance, paid vacation
Assistant manager	\$14/hour (30 hours/week)	None
Sales associate 1	\$10/hour (20 hours/week)	None
Sales associate 2	\$10/hour (15 hours/week)	None
Sales associate 3	\$8/hour (10 hours/week)	None
Sales associate 4	\$8/hour (10 hours/week)	None
Seasonal help	\$4,000 (approx.)	None

Exhibit 3

Hiring at Huckle Buckle Beanstalk: Not All Fun and Games

Résumés of Interviewees for Store Manager Position

JAMES C. ANDERSON
120 Cherry Lane
Staunton, Virginia 24401
(540) 992-1493
andersonretail@valleyco.net

Objective

An exciting retail management position with opportunities to join a motivated team in providing excellent customer service

Summary of Qualifications

- Retail Manager with experience with a major department store chain. Skilled at employee training and supervision; adherence to company standards; and customer relations.

Notable Achievements

- Led redesign team for Clifton's floor layout, resulting in a more attractive store and an increase in customer traffic year over year.
- Averaged 17% year-to-year sales increase.

Experience

Clifton's Department Store

Assistant Store Manager, 2008 - 2010

Trained and supervised sales staff (9) for men's and home departments. Increased store inventory and expanded merchandise purchases. Responsibilities included customer service, staff management, and all facets of running a department store.

Reinhardt Department Store

Men's Department Manager, 2005 - 2008

Promoted from hourly position. Responsible for increased sales through more attractive department layout. Daily operations included cash deposits and inventory control.

Men's Department Senior Sales Associate, 2001-2005

Men's Department Sales Associate, 1999-2001

Children's Department Sales Associate, 1997-1999

Education

Staunton River High School

Graduate with Honors, 1997

President of the Business Club

Exhibit 3 (continued)

Elizabeth Baughan
213 N. Olympic Ave. * Waynesboro, VA 22980
(434) 232-3040 * fourbaughans@cox.net

Goal

Opportunity to lead an energized team as the Store Manager at Huckle Buckle Beanstalk.

Skills

Strong sense of ethics.
Demonstrated ability to take on new responsibilities.
Knowledge of HBB point of sale/inventory management system.
Excellent customer service ability.

Employment History

Huckle Buckle Beanstalk, Staunton, VA

Sales Associate, 2007-present

Assisted customers with all inquiries and purchases. Responsible for reorganizing building toys section that led to increased sales. Earned responsibility to open and close store in absence of manager and assistant manager.

Shoe Factory, Harrisonburg, VA

Senior Sales Associate, 1988-1990

Responsible for all aspects of customer service, making bank deposits, and securing store at close.

Education

Longwood University – B.A., Communications, 1988

Exhibit 3 (continued)

CANDICE JANE TURNER

**14 Dairy Way Swoope VA 24479
(540) 982-2230 (h) (540) 816-2039 (c)**

Objective

Management and leadership position within a dynamic and challenging environment that puts a strong emphasis on customer service.

Accomplishments

- Maintained schedules for entire office staff.
- Served as initial point of contact for members and visitors.
- Supervised administrative assistant and two account managers.
- Placed orders for office supplies, equipment, and services.).
- Supported management and assisted with major projects.
- Resolved accounting issues regarding invoicing.
- Performed daily clerical functions.
- Processed accounts payable and payroll time sheets.

Experience

Highlands Chamber of Commerce - Office Manager, 2002 - Present

- Designed annual Chamber of Commerce Business Directory.
- Responsible for major events including annual luncheon.
- Supported Chamber President in all aspects of operations.
- Oversaw office staff and sales managers and served as key liaison to members and the public.

Valley Industries - Office Manager, 1999 - 2002

- Responsible for coordinating all shipping and receiving operations for this distribution center.
- Maintained shipping records and coordinated reporting from various departments.
- Handled customer calls, invoicing and weekly reporting on production.

Skills

- Microsoft Office Suite, Windows 7, Constant Contact

Education

Blue Ridge Community College
A.A., Communications, 2000
Covington High School, Diploma, 1998