

Summer Help

School's nearly out, and some clients may approach you about summer jobs for their kids. **Evan Thompson** shows you how navigate this sticky situation



The question sounds simple enough.

"Can you give our son Brandon a summer job?"

But your response will either deepen your relationship with the client or set it back several years. The best strategy is to prepare ahead of time. That means thinking about issues such as whether:

- Your firm or branch allows the hiring of clients' relatives;
- Your practice would benefit by hiring a summer student, assuming they are qualified to do the work you assign to them;

- You know the kid;
- Taking on the unproven child of a key client might be a risk;
- Colleagues have had a good or bad experience if they hired clients' relatives in the past; and
- It worked out for the full-time team and the clients they engaged.

If your firm forbids the hiring of clients' relatives, you need only advise the client of the policy while offering to meet with the candidate to offer some tips. Consider saying a variation of one of these statements.

“We are not looking for summer help, but I would be glad to meet Brandon and offer some suggestions that might help in the search. Please have Brandon send a resume and we can book some time to chat.”

Why it works: You are clearly and confidently communicating your decision not to hire Brandon this summer while softening the blow by offering to meet with him to help him find summer work. You have left no room for misinterpretation, and your client will appreciate your candour and interest in helping Brandon.

“I appreciate your interest in our firm. I can’t make any promises and would have to explore the matter with my business partners. But please ask Brandon to send a resume and I will review it.”

Why it works: The client will understand that your business partners also have a say in deciding whether or not to hire Brandon. While managing the client’s expectations, you are also demonstrating a collaborative, professional approach by consulting your partners first. Your request for his resume shows your interest in Brandon and the attention you will devote to the matter.

“As you can imagine, we have received many applications for summer work, but I would be delighted to review Brandon’s resume and let you know whether his credentials fit our needs at this time.”

Why it works: The client is immediately aware that Brandon is facing plenty of competition. You have made two promises that you can easily honour (reviewing his resume and assessing his credentials against your needs). If you don’t hire him, you are also graciously leaving the door open as your firm might consider him another summer when his skillset better reflects the job description. Besides, he may share his positive impression of you and your team with fellow job-seekers.

“We don’t have any summer help requirements this year, but please send a resume for future reference.”

Why it works: This courteous and decisive response effectively ends the conversation while expressing your interest in reviewing the candidate’s resume in the future.

Now let’s look at four responses to avoid.

“I am sure Brandon is a smart person, but I can’t make a decision without a resume or meeting. Please send a resume and I will see what I can do. I’ll let you know one way or the other.”

Why it fails: This offers no tangible feedback to a client who wants their son or daughter to find a summer job or begin a career in the financial services industry.

“We’re not hiring, but I would be glad to talk to some colleagues in the industry and see what might be available.”

Why it fails: Encouraging your client’s child to reach out to a competitor you recommend takes tremendous confidence in your relationship with your client. You may look like a hero initially but your altruism could backfire once the client has a conversation at the child’s suggestion with the hiring firm. Not worth the risk.

“As long as it’s a junior role, I don’t see a problem. As long as they don’t mind working in the stock room or kitchen area.”

Why it fails: This is playing with fire. There may not be a junior role available. To suggest otherwise will position you as out of touch with your business.

“I will talk with some other clients and see if they are hiring for the summer, but they may not be in the investment industry. Have Brandon send me a resume and I will see what I can do.”

Why it fails: This suggests that you are off-loading the request to others who probably don’t know the client, let alone his or her child. It removes any control you may have of the conversations the candidate may have with your other clients.

“I haven’t seen a resume, but am sure Brandon is a great asset. I would be disappointed if things didn’t work out at our firm. I value your relationship with us, but the whole idea is a bit risky for everyone.”

Why it fails: You are dismissing the idea of hiring Brandon without even modest consideration, which may insult the client. You have no sense of Brandon’s merits because you haven’t seen his resume. And your negative suggestion that things may not work out flies in the face of taking a proactive and positive approach to managing your client’s financial affairs. Finally, you are not showing empathy for Brandon or the client when you put your discomfort first.

You’ve reviewed the resume and have decided to interview Brandon. Great, but before you move ahead with the interview, discuss your wish to potentially hire the candidate with your partners and team. Even if you are a senior partner or manager, it is essential to advise the team that a summer hiring may go ahead as they could be responsible for the lion’s share of the candidate’s training.

If the fit is right and your firm’s policies are respected, there is nothing unethical about hiring a client’s son or daughter. While you want to maintain good relationships with all clients, rushing to please before considering the risks may have unintended consequences. 📍

EVAN THOMPSON is a business relationship and personal branding expert and is head of Toronto-based Evan Thompson and Associates. Evan can be reached at evan@evanthompsonandassociates.com or @CSuiteProspects on Twitter.