

Thoughts about attendants from an experienced RN whose husband has C-4 tetraplegia (quadriplegia).

1. Be flexible. If possible let go of any biases regarding gender, sexual preference, race, etc. We have had a wide range of people work for us: male and female, gay and straight, white, black, Indian, etc. The wider you leave the door open the more possibilities that exist. The bottom line for us is getting someone that can do the job and be trustworthy. So, our focus is on if they are a good, trustworthy person who can learn the necessary tasks.
2. Treat employees with respect. Please and thank you go along way. At the same time, don't let the boundary get fuzzy about who has the authority. You are the boss and have the ultimate say. Be friendly, but always keep it clear that you are the boss and decision maker.
3. Allow for time off. Work out other resources to provide for time off. Everyone needs a vacation to get refreshed.
4. Do periodic "quality control" checks. Even the best attendants can slip into poor techniques.
5. Do all the safety checks: references, WA state patrol check. If you have a bad feeling in your gut, trust it.
6. Have someone who knows you, cares about you, and is a good read of people help you interview. Two heads are better than one.
7. If hiring is very difficult for you and the success rate has been poor, look for another avenue to assist you. Specifically, I have worked with several families who have needed/chosen to have someone else do the hiring. One of these went with a temporary agency, and the guy that does the hiring is excellent. They charge a finders fee, but for this family it was well worth it in the quality and length of commitment they got from the attendants. Another family I worked with hired a rehab professional (speech pathologist), who works part time, to do the hiring, interviewing, and narrowing down to a couple of final candidates. This also worked out well.
8. Get short-term relief if needed. It can be tough, but there are resources for the immediate need. Again, I worked with a family who got a short term caregiver through Family Resources. This worked out well until they got a permanent caregiver hired. The short term caregiver was a high quality person.
9. Continually network. Make connections with others when possible that could help you in the future, either with relief of a caregiver, hiring, or whatever. Specifically, try to line up the short term relief now, just by getting phone numbers, checking cost, etc. When the crisis hits, it always hits hard, so be as prepared as possible.
10. Experience. My belief is that almost anyone can learn the tasks of providing care, so don't worry about an attendant having past experience. Sometimes you have to un-do what they learned before anyways. Almost anyone can learn to catheterize, do a bowel program, transfers, etc. We focus on the quality and integrity of the person and know that we can teach them the specific tasks.
11. Advertising. There are lots of ways to advertise that can be effective. Personally, we go right to the newspaper because it's the most efficient for us. I don't have the time to hang flyers, etc.
12. Hiring attendants is hard, necessary and a hassle, but it is doable. The things I said above have been our experience and we have had good success. I suspect it's easier if you have another person to share the burden with, and I suspect that the process of hiring has been easier when married to a rehab nurse. I'm confident he's a better manager than me, and the length of time people have been with us is probably due to his personality and the way he manages attendants. Hiring a caregiver is stressful and you just have to make the process as effective and efficient as possible.