



# KEYS TO RETAINING TOP TALENT

Attracting and recruiting talent. Such an important function. Many companies spend a considerable portion of their human resources budget in anticipation of recruitment activities. But recruiting is only half the equation in staffing. Retention is equally, if not more, important to the bottom line. There is no benefit in gearing up to hire the best talent if they leave to go to work for your closest competitor. While most business professionals agree that talented employees are their most valuable asset, priority must be given to keeping them as well as finding them in the first place. Savvy business owners and managers have figured out that turnover is exceptionally costly, particularly when dealing with skilled professionals. Combined with the sheer cost of the recruitment process itself, there are the additional burdens associated with adjusting team dynamics, providing training, and developing the new employee to a reasonable level, along with the impact on existing employees having to pick up the slack during the gap. All of these conditions take precious time away from your core mission and often impact customer and shareholder perceptions of your corporate health and reputation.

So what can you do to effectively keep your best employees from jumping ship? Here are the keys to retaining that top talent:

**Instill a positive culture and make employees feel valued.** It is often said that employees don't leave companies, they leave bad managers. Managers who treat employees with respect, don't micromanage, recognize good work, and provide feedback typically have employees with a good sense of self-worth. Such employees will often not only stay, but take responsibility for the outcomes of their work and will go the extra mile to accomplish goals.

**Provide growth opportunities.** Employees who stay engaged in their jobs and remain committed long-term are most often those with whom the organization has invested ongoing training and development. Make certain that each team member has a thorough understanding of the work requirements. If appropriate, develop a structured mentoring program that will pair a seasoned professional with a less experienced one to develop new competencies and provide feedback. Partner with a local university or training specialist if available to provide ongoing, relevant, up-to-date learning opportunities for your professional staff. When employees feel stagnant and/or bored, they are more likely to seek opportunity elsewhere. Each employee should have a career development discussion and formal plan in order to understand exactly the path he/she might expect to follow. Goal-setting with coaching and feedback along with job challenges that expand the employee's knowledge are

crucial to the employees' understanding that the company is indeed interested in an investment in them and their careers.

**Provide clear, open communications.** Rumor and innuendo thrive in a vacuum and you might find good people leaving when trust and credibility are lacking simply because of uncertainty for the organization's future. In addition, listen and respond to employee feedback. Soliciting employee opinions and suggestions, then acknowledging and acting upon such input impacts employee perception positively.

**Inspire confidence with your management style.** Executive management teams that foster trust, build strong relationships, and demonstrate competence not only lead their organizations to new heights, they typically tend to have higher retention rates among staff. An employer cannot be guilty of saying one thing and then doing another. For example, an employer cannot talk about being customer focused and then only reward employees for sheer numbers of accounts (think Wells Fargo). In addition, very few creative people respond well to authoritarian style management or micromanagement, so if your organization is struggling with retention of forward-thinking professionals, you might want to rethink your overall management style.



**Provide competitive compensation, benefits, and rewards.** While money is not the chief motivator for many people, too low a level of compensation can be a major demotivator. Many people tie compensation to the organization's assessment of personal worth and/or appreciation, and if it is seriously lacking, regardless of other factors, many employees will start looking for greener pastures. A total compensation package is not just a competitive salary, but can include such things as profit sharing, retirement plans, insurance provision and cost offsetting, bonus programs, paid time off, tuition reimbursement, clothing allowances, vehicle provision, on-site meal facilities, daycare and adoption assistance, or other perks specific to the organization. Rewards provided to employees are powerful messages about the relative worth of the human assets, particularly if the company is seen investing in capital or other expenditures, especially executive perks. Rewards can be as simple as on-the-spot recognition for a job well-done and as elaborate as a free vacation for meeting a specific goal. A pat on the back, a sincere "thank you," a handwritten note from the manager or the organization's highest officer is often remembered long after the memory of the actual accomplishment has faded. Additionally, organizations must keep their promises with regard to rewards. Many an employee has become disillusioned when the personal end of the bargain has been upheld only to have the corporation withdraw the delivery based on some nefarious reason.

**Provide work-life balance.** People do have lives outside work and it is best that organizations recognize that most people, particularly those of younger generations, will tell you that they work to live, not live to work. Non-standard or flexible work schedules, opportunities to work from home, or compressed workweeks all can satisfy the need of the employee to balance the demands at home to the demands of the workplace. Employees who are less stressed are happier and healthier, providing the employer with more productivity and reduced insurance costs.

**Encourage healthy lifestyles.** Smoking cessation programs, ergonomic workstations, on-site walking paths or exercise facilities, wellness programs, weight loss competitions, and annual physicals all can be incorporated into the corporate focus on keeping employees healthy while communicating that you really do care about them as individuals. While these can be considered perks, they can be cost effective as well. Many insurance carriers will provide rates favorable to the employer when the organization can demonstrate that there is a corporate spotlight on healthy lifestyles. Employers consistently ranked among the best for whom to work all emphasize wellness and their turnover rates reflect the employees' satisfaction with those organizations.

**Weed early and quickly.** This may seem contrary to retention, but if it becomes apparent in the first few weeks that the newhire is not suited for the position, it is important to recognize the issue and deal with it. During those first few weeks on the job, the employer should provide intense feedback and expect the same in return. If a disconnect is present between the new employee's expectations and that of the employer, an early release will allow the

employee to pursue other opportunities and not waste valuable resources if apparent that further training will not help the situation. It also will not put the rest of the team in the position of having to carry the weight of an incompetent or unhappy member, which can dramatically impact overall morale and productivity. That said, before taking drastic measures, make certain you have not set the new employee up for failure by giving vague instructions or insufficient training.

In conclusion, proper retention strategies are the key to the preservation of top talent. While having cutting-edge recruitment tools and approaches are important in attracting outstanding employees, today's smart organizations are committed to keeping the fine talent they already have in place and understand that retaining the best is just as important as hiring the best.

