

RETENTION: KEEPING YOUR KEEPERS

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Quite frequently, I meet with my peers in Human Resources and recruiting from companies located in the Washington metropolitan area to discuss the current job market and its effects upon our ability to retain the talented people we already have on our payrolls. Across the board in February 2004, in all industry segments, virtually everyone indicated that they were experiencing increased competition for the better qualified candidates. Correspondingly, there was considerable concern that turnover rates would continue to rise for all of us. Hence, the question we all sought to answer is, “How do we keep the talent we already have?”

While everyone agrees that there is no silver bullet that will guarantee retention, there are a number of effective techniques shared among this group. There are far too many ideas to allow a complete listing, but here are a few that I believe can help any organization keep their “keepers.”

In recruiting new people to the organization, take the time and spend the effort to carefully select individuals whose skills and interests fit the job and whose style matches the existing culture. We have heard numerous tales of failure that resulted from rushing warm bodies into place without regard to fit. Too often, these quick hires required unreasonable amounts of management time and had a demoralizing effect on the rest of the team. Unfortunately, it seems every organization has to learn this lesson the hard way—by personal experience.

Assimilating newer members of a team into the existing culture should not be left to chance. Some companies have had great success in assigning buddies to new hires to help show them the ropes and provide a support system for their early days in the new environment. On an ongoing basis, keeping talented people engaged and growing can often be enhanced by a mentoring program. Clearly, these programs do not just happen. As Human Resources professionals, it is often up to us to convince management of the value of such programs and offer the tools to conduct them effectively.

Human Resources professionals also see the need for perennial re-education and training of line managers about job market realities and the needs and expectations of today’s employees. As much as we would all like to have people be “plug and play,” the reality is that humans have ever-changing individual needs and seek to be heard and recognized accordingly.

Many of the other ideas that have been discussed fall into the following eight categories:

- **COMMUNICATE** – Keep your employees well informed about what is going on in your business, both the good news and the bad. Be sure that communications flow as easily up the organization as down.
- **EDUCATE** – Continue to provide your employees the opportunity to improve themselves and their skills. Require managers to attend periodic retraining in areas of recruitment, retention, and performance management. Remember, it is usually the managers who need it the most who choose not to attend.

- **COMPENSATE** – Reward your employees fairly at market competitive rates. Do not try to hire at the lowest rate possible. There are no secrets in compensation anymore, so don't pretend there are.
- **MOTIVATE** – Provide good leadership with managers who care and willingly share their vision for the business.
- **ACCOMODATE** – Listen to and respond to the special needs and requests of your employees as you would a member of your family.
- **ACCELERATE** – Promote when ready, rather than by a dictated schedule. And reward instantly, rather than once a year.
- **TERMINATE** – Provide developmental support, but get rid of nonperformers quickly. It will boost the morale of the rest of the team.
- **CELEBRATE** – Make everyone a part of both the big and the little wins of your business. Celebrations can create a sense of contribution and belonging—both critical aspects of a retention program.

In today's service-oriented economy, companies will rise or fall based almost entirely upon their abilities to recruit and retain talented people. Shouldn't employee retention be a top priority at your firm?