

# Boosting employee retention

09 Jul 2007 | Dan Bobinski

Perhaps you've heard that throwing more money at a problem doesn't always fix the problem. This is true in a lot of areas, including employee retention. Yet far too many employers seem stuck in the mindset that people will stay around if they're given a big enough raise.

It ought to be common knowledge by now, but it probably bears repeating: People leave their managers more often than they leave companies and jobs.

Therefore, you'd think that more companies would invest in equipping their management in how to work more effectively with their rank-and-file.

Strangely, while that knowledge might be inside people's heads, it's having a tough time finding its way down into practical application. An overwhelming number of otherwise intelligent leaders and managers continue looking for that magic workshop or wizard consultant who will provide the secret formula that makes employees want to stay.

Despite all the hype we see in the brochures sent out by the traveling road shows, spending \$199 and sitting through an eight-hour workshop will not suddenly cause retention to improve.

## What Employees Are Looking For

People want to know what's expected of them, they want their opinion to matter, they want a challenge, and they want their work to count for something. They want to be respected.

They want opportunities to learn and grow. They don't want to be treated like a mushroom or as an easily-replaceable number.

Is it so hard for managers to create these conditions? Apparently, in many companies, it is.

In fact, a story once appeared on ABC News in which they said that poor managers are so common, counselors have actually developed the term "Bad Boss Syndrome."

Think about it: If you had a boss that never said thank you, who was constantly critical, who never clarified what was expected of you, who never trained you in what might help you in your career, and who never explained how your work fit into the bigger picture, how would you feel?

## Hard Numbers on Supervisors

For those who'd rather rely on hard numbers, I offer the following research by Sirota Survey Intelligence in New York. They found that of the people planning on quitting their jobs within one year, only 33 percent said they were satisfied with their supervisor.

Of the people who said they planned on staying at least five years with their current employer, 85 percent were satisfied with their supervisor.

Then there's data from the Emerging Workforce Study. In companies where training was considered excellent, only 12 percent of the employees were planning on leaving within a year. But in companies where training was considered poor or nonexistent, 42 percent of employees were planning on leaving within a year.

For an example of how much people want to be engaged, we can look in the June issue of Training and read about a young woman named Andrea, the associate editor at Outreach magazine. Andrea says she would like to get out of her job pretty soon. "The company is not very intentional about training me," she says. "I have to figure most things out myself."

She goes on to say, "as far as a better title, I don't have anything within my grasp right now ... all this actually discourages me from staying at a job... if there is no clearly marked path of growth that I'm on, a position or promotion I'm striving for, or any sort of healthy competition, I feel stagnant."

It doesn't take much to realize that if Andrea's company doesn't give her those things, she will move on.

### **Everything's Fine, Except . . .**

Consider also the words of a professional who agreed to speak only on the condition he remain anonymous: "I will be as loyal to my employer as they are to me - but at the end of the day, I'm out of here. I like the work I was hired to do, and my colleagues are okay, but I can't stand my manager's passive-aggressive behavior and the fact that despite constantly achieving my KPI's, I am never, ever complimented on doing a good job."

In the end, no magic potions and no magic wands exist. And no one-day workshop will ever turn a crew of bad managers around all by itself. Employers must have a genuine desire to build bridges with employees, along with consistent actions supporting that desire.

According to David Sirota, chairman emeritus of Sirota Survey Intelligence, "Each of the reasons [that people quit] represents a failure of organizations to create an environment of genuine partnership ... Employees' needs for 'achievement' plays a critical role in whether an employee will stay at a job for any length of time."

Bottom line, it's probably safe to say that if employers have a problem with retention, they shouldn't throw money at the problem; they should throw their heart and soul into it.

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