



How To Retain Employees When What You've Tried Isn't Working

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The moment an employee decides to leave an organization, it's too late. Their productivity dips, their engagement languishes, and all of their discretionary time is spent updating their resume and seeking other opportunities. As Josh Bersin, principal at Deloitte and founder of Bersin by Deloitte, indicates, the costs of employee turnover are increasingly high - as much as 1.5 to 2 times an employee's salary.¹

The hard work of constantly hiring and training new employees causes leaders to seek new perspectives on improving retention. Typical advice for reducing turnover often includes things many companies already try to do: offering competitive pay, strong benefits packages and laying out clear paths for advancement. So why do these strategies often fail?

This whitepaper aims to offer a new perspective on how to improve retention and outlines proven strategies that too few companies realize exist.

Admit It: What You're Doing Isn't Working



In most companies, only a single broad turnover metric is reported, so problem areas are notoriously overlooked. Without targeted problem areas, HR often turns to sweeping measures to correct climbing turnover rates. However these one-size-fits-all attempts at improving retention often yield less than expected returns.

For example, greater career advancement opportunities only aid unsatisfied employees who happen to be seeking out higher-level positions. Larger benefits packages may satisfy only a small portion of employees who feel that their companies should be giving them more.

Perhaps the worst example of a desperate quick fix to preventing turnover is the counter-offer. When employees turn in resignation letters, employers frequently attempt a final “Hail Mary”. There are few things more ironic to departing employees than an offer to increase their pay. It’s rare that employees leave their jobs solely because of compensation.² Thus, unless the resignation letter is written in a veiled last-ditch attempt for a bump in income, the counter-offer is just further evidence that the employer has no idea why this particular individual is unsatisfied.

If quick fixes such as those listed above have been attempted with less-than-desired results at your company, it’s time to dig deeper.

Dig Deeper and Uncover Why People Are Unsatisfied



Perhaps one of the biggest mistakes managers make is assuming that everyone views their job and the company as they do. And it's just a matter of time before this misperception contributes to employees leaving the organization.

This erroneous assumption on the part of managers often creates a barrier between managers and employees right from the start. Not every employee has the same desires for their career or the same motivations when it comes to their job. Additionally, not all employees thrive in the same work environment.

Yet managers often make the mistake of thinking, "If it worked for me and I was able to climb up the ranks, it should work for them too." Employees frequently cite their managers as a reason for their unhappiness at work. Perhaps the root cause of that complaint is a lack of effort to understand their employees and their underlying work-related motivators.

As such, managers must possess a desire to listen to employees in order to improve their work experiences and tap into their unique motivations at work. Otherwise, their ability to curb high turnover will be stunted.

Align People With The Work That Matches Their Motivation



Once supervisors realize that each employee is unique, the next step of understanding each employee begins. While one individual may thrive when working in teams, another individual might be more motivated by the challenge of resolving problems on their own. This realization is the exact reason why quick fixes and one-size-fits-all repairs fail to improve retention.

Up until this point, managers may have forced all employees to work as a team. Or perhaps they required each person to work individually on key problems. Upon

realizing that different working conditions might need to be established for different members of the team, a flexible alignment structure has to be taken seriously.

While managers must make a significant effort at understanding each of their team members' unique work-related motivators, they must also be open to taking on the task of restructuring the way employees go about their work in a way that taps into these motivators.

To some organizations, this may feel like a daunting task and even a bit uncomfortable due to its subjective nature. However, a study detailing one orientation



of employee motivation -- flexibility over work schedules and environment -- has already proven that attempts at subjective motivational efforts pay off. In the study conducted by University of Minnesota and MIT Sloan, researchers found that those employees granted the freedom of discretionary design of their workday and environment reported greater job satisfaction and were less burned out and stressed. Previous studies have also shown that organizational initiatives that improve employees' subjective wellbeing also improve the bottom line: they increase productivity and decrease absenteeism, turnover, and presenteeism—which means showing up, but not being engaged at work.³

Managers should be asking:

- 👉 What's going to motivate each employee to perform his or her best at work?
- 👉 How can I motivate each member of my team so that his or her inherent motivators are tapped into?
- 👉 How can I establish work environments that support those unique motivators?

And then the real implementation begins: actually making those changes happen.



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1. Bersin, Josh, "Employee Retention Now a Big Issue: Why the Tide has Turned," LinkedIn Pulse, August 16, 2013.
2. Snyder, Benjamin "Half of us have quit our job because of a bad boss," Fortune Magazine, April 2, 2015.
3. Phyllis Moen, Erin L. Kelly, Wen Fan, Shi-Rong Lee, David Almeida, Ellen Kossek, and Orfeu Buxton, "Does a Flexibility/Support Organizational Initiative Improve High-Tech Employees' Well-Being? Evidence from the Work, Family, and Health Network." American Sociological Review 1-31 2016.