



Get It Right And Keep It Right: Retention Starts With Recruiting

By Emerson Hughes

Hiring the right employees and retaining key employees are fundamental HR practices. Search firms that truly partner with their clients participate fully in both practices. We have partnered with clients on both fronts for years, long before retention became a hot topic. Now retention is a preoccupation as the war for talent heats up.

We have always believed that providing a service that supports and enhances retention delivers additional value to our clients, rendering our core service—recruitment—more cost-effective, and strengthening our relationship with our client at the same time.

Many years ago we researched the reasons why employees leave. We learned that there are 10 primary resignation motivators, and recent research indicates that those motivators are still at play. We analyzed the motivators and determined that we could directly influence 7 of them; 3 are recruiting and selection related, and 4 are essentially disconnects or failures in communication. So, we developed recruiting and communications protocols to address the motivators in an attempt to obviate resignations. These protocols are embedded in everything we do, starting with the first meeting with a client to get job specs. We have found them to be effective, as, sadly, many companies are resistant to change. They are not doing everything that could be done to retain their employees and, as a result, they are watching their talent walk out the door.

Let's look at the most common reasons employees leave and what external recruiters can do to improve the retention

of the employees they recruit for their clients.

1. The job or workplace was not as expected. This can be addressed during the recruiting and selection process. Recruiters need to present a clear and accurate description of the job, the performance expectations, the supervisor's management style, weaknesses and strengths, the corporate culture and values. The corporate company and the candidate going into a new job should be fully informed.

2. Poor fit. There is a mismatch between the job and the hire, or the hire and the supervisor. This, too, can be addressed during the recruiting and selection process. The assessment process should be rigorous. Drill down; then, drill down again.

3. There are too few growth and advancement opportunities. Again, this is an issue that can be addressed during the recruiting and selection process. Recruiters should ensure that there will be enough of a career runway for the candidate's ambitions. The recruiter should understand the candidate's career objectives and carefully assess motivations.

4. Once on the job, there is too little coaching and feedback, or all too frequently, none at all. This is a communication and management problem. External recruiters can facilitate, and sometimes orchestrate, communications between a manager and employee. We communicate regularly with our hires, and when appropriate, we convene meetings and include the human

resources department. The key is that we are proactive.

5. The employee feels devalued and unrecognized. This, too, is a communications and management problem. Again, we are proactive and facilitate communication between the manager and employee. Recognition is one of the most effective ways to retain and motivate your employees. A well-designed recognition program can have a significant impact on employee loyalty and also influence behaviors, attitudes, values, customer satisfaction, process improvements, time to market, quality—the list is potentially endless, and unique to every company. The point is, people respond to recognition and appreciation.

6. The employee is stressed from overwork and a work-life imbalance. This is frequently a communication problem, and it is usually solvable. The key is to acknowledge the conditions and not permit them to persist without attempting to relieve the pressure, even temporarily. Without relief, the pressure will build and lead to a resignation.

7. There is a loss of trust and confidence in senior leaders. This is frequently a communication problem. Leaders who don't communicate or communicate ineffectively are often unaware of the problem. We encourage our hires to precipitate communication with their manager, to ask questions, to get informed, to network in the company and to reach out to the human resources department.

We are constantly looking for strategies and ideas that we can share with our clients to help them retain their key employees.

On a regular basis, we meet with our clients and review their retention practices, their successes and disappointments. We nudge them towards adopting retention best practices. Here are some ideas:


- Develop effective corporate employee communications strategies and programs that help employees understand the business. Share information, open the channels of communication (starting at the top and let the information cascade down) and explain the company's reward philosophy.
- Upgrade your performance-based compensation systems and stay ahead of the curve. Gradually move the focus of comp plans away from base salary toward incentive compensation.
- Provide lateral and cross-functional assignments or projects.
- Poor performance by colleagues can negatively affect the retention of high-potential employees; therefore, weed out apathetic and 'C' performers. Poor managers are a liability. Develop, redeploy or replace them.
- Create customized and achievable career and skills development plans.
- Keep employees abreast of their progress and what they need to do, on a continual basis, to remain high-potential employees. Provide tools to help them track performance against objectives. Amplify the company's long-term commitment to them.
- Provide recognition, formal and informal.
- Upgrade your onboarding process. Day 1 can have a tremendous impact on engagement.
- Provide tools that help employees improve their productivity and effectiveness.
- Use knowledge management systems and tools that facilitate collaboration and networking.
- For the right fit, the hiring process should be rigorous; get it right in the first place.
- Job sculpt—Design jobs or assignments that satisfy employees' interests and use their unique talents.



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- Ensure that employees appreciate all the elements of the company's total rewards package, both tangible and intangible. Include training and development programs.
- Conduct frequent "stay interviews".
- Develop and upgrade communication skills in supervisors and managers; when skills are weak, design programs and tools to facilitate communications between boss and subordinate. Frequent communications should be mandatory.
- Success in retaining talent should be a performance expectation for managers, at all levels of the organization.
- Managers and HR should collaboratively ensure that employees' career needs and objectives are being met. Ensure employees' careers don't stall.
- Provide regular performance evaluations. Managers should schedule regular meetings with subordinates to discuss strengths, weaknesses and progress toward career goals.
- Develop good communication and leadership skills across the organization.
- Take frequent employee satisfaction surveys. Find out what employees value in a workplace environment. Broadcast your efforts to act on the findings.
- Provide managers with performance management training.

- Strengthen internal sourcing and recruiting processes. Provide recruiters with frequent training. Benchmark your processes against other organizations.
- Ensure that recruiting criteria on job descriptions are consistent with criteria to be used subsequently in performance reviews.
- Extend your succession planning programs. Include every key position. If the position is 'mission critical', plan for succession.
- Ensure that employees have a clear understanding of their career path options and the opportunities you provide. Provide training and development programs that are linked to employees' desired career path.
- Provide work-life balance support and options, such as flextime, telecommuting or job sharing.
- Provide managers with interview training. Hold out for the best fit candidate.
- Conduct rigorous reference checks.
- Provide a clear statement of how employee performance is measured. Clearly differentiate between excellent and average performance. Describe how performance is measured, assessed, recognized and rewarded.

The championship is won in the draft, and we owe it to our clients and to the people we recruit to get it right the first time. It may seem obvious, but if rigorous due diligence isn't applied to the talent acquisition process, then, it can be very difficult to right the ship. We should do everything we can to help our clients keep it right. That is the value we add. 

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