

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR PEOPLE

Recently, I have overheard two individuals hilariously chatting about a job opening they saw on an ad. Apparently the advertisement had two important elements. The first request was “having a flexible schedule,” which was immediately announced by one of those individuals as a “subtle way of saying the work is for 7 days a week.” It did not stop there. After reading the second requirement, namely “openness to new work experience and responsibilities,” a hilarious question was brought, complete with the full bodied flavour of sarcasm: “So are you ready for the incredible experience of doing grunt work?” It shouldn’t be a surprise: A lot of talented people today know “what the catch is,” and they stay clear of these types of “opportunities” when they can. Consequently, for many organizations the search for “talent” ends sadly, the moment a job ad is put up.

Under these circumstances, attracting and retaining talent becomes an important challenge. There are certain simple, yet undervalued strategies that increase retention:

Rule I: Offer relevant and only relevant work to the individuals’ skills, as “cutting corners” doesn’t pay off, it actually makes you lose money.

A simple fact: Irrelevant work, especially if it is repetitive and simple, burns out high-functioning people. When you are burdening your talent with “small work” which they aren’t trained for, you’re guaranteeing the loss of this individual in the long term. “I can’t start implementing this idea we talked about because I was busy sorting out the folders” is an expression that you should watch out for - as this usually means the individual is *aware* their talent isn’t utilized,

which is followed by moving to a place where it will be.

The rationale behind giving people jobs that don’t fit to their skills may look like a money saver. It’s important to see that it, is in fact, at the cost of unrealized good ideas and high performance that could have carried your organization to the future.

Rule II: Define solid measures for success for a solid job definition.

This goes in hand in hand with Rule I. It’s critical to have a solid job definition with clearly defined borders and expectations. This is a very important point when it comes to motivation because it helps put performance expectations into a concrete foundation. This helps ensure employees have a sense of direction, preventing loss of motivation from unanticipated disciplinary actions.

A recent client talked about his experience in a big organization. The chain of events that ultimately led to his dismissal was unexpected from his side, but they are by no means uncommon. He explained how he was assigned to a project that wasn’t really within the range of his expertise or job description. Being the optimist, curious learner he is, he embraced this as an opportunity and started developing himself, while looking for ways to get the job done.

Unfortunately, the challenges were just starting. Shortly after, a supervisor stepped in to monitor his work and explained to him that there is already an established way of doing things, and he should simply follow the routine. This feedback reduced this engineer to a mere pair of hands, someone with a job that a clerk can easily manage. Needless to say, performance went down just as motivation did - and he got fired.

In other words he was terminated because he didn't meet the criteria which he didn't know about, doing a job he didn't have training and background for. He may have lost a position, but the organization lost a *future* - a future he could help build with his ideas.

Rule III: You may not offer the best salary, but you can offer the best perks.

Let's face it, salaries are where companies compete with each other and this drives expectations up. Large organizations who tend to pay better may have a perceived upper-hand when it comes to attracting and retaining talent. The reality is, there are other paths to retention that are open to every organization! A lot of talented people want more than a paycheck as money is not everything for them. People in large companies feel their contribution is small compared to the total project and they feel insignificant. As per Rule I above, giving people the ability to develop and use their talents is an important element. There are additional perks you can offer that can make you stand out, such as offering flexible work hours or giving extra days off.

These are tremendous advantages, especially so if your organization is not among the Fortune 500. Large organizations find it a lot harder to provide their people with these perks. With little effort, you can make your employees say "Well, I may not be getting the best salary, but I *love* my work, I *develop* here and find time to *enjoy* my life."

Rule IV: Help people develop themselves and your organization.

This is the ultimate goal that you want to get to. If you apply every rule successfully, it means you also have satisfied this one. By providing

relevant and accurate work for your employees (Rule I), and defining clear-cut criteria for the expectations while leaving people to put their own signature to the work (Rule II) you have already established an organized, worry free workflow. You have helped retention by listening to your employees and offering them the flexibility they want and need (Rule III).

Welcome to Rule IV, where you are further enabling your people into mutual growth. At this stage, your employees are already showing behaviour of "organizational citizenship." They are finding the will and the opportunity to grow, and they are more than happy to share this growth with your organization as well. The rest simply lies on good leadership: Support, coach and help people get to the next level and carry your organization there.

What are you doing for your people? What are your people doing for you?