

Keep Your Best: Retention Tips

Retention in an Improving Job Market

By Susan M. Heathfield, About.com Guide

Recruiting the right employees and keeping the right employees matters, especially now.

A recent Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) press release revealed the answer to the question of what people plan to do when the job market rebounds. The majority of the Human Resource (HR) professionals and managers surveyed agreed that turnover will rise significantly once the job market improves. Both groups felt that the job market will improve within the next year, according to the latest Job Recovery Survey.

The survey is produced by SHRM and CareerJournal.com, the free, executive career site of *The Wall Street Journal*, two of my personal favorite sites. The survey results include responses from 451 HR professionals and 300 managerial or executive employees.

"We're surprised by the percentage of executive employees who say they plan to jump ship once hiring rebounds," says Tony Lee, editor in chief/general manager of CareerJournal.com. "And with 56 percent of HR professionals agreeing that turnover will rise, we're interested to see what types of retention efforts those companies launch to keep their best employees on board."

Employees cited the following three top reasons they would begin searching for a new job:

- 53 percent seek better compensation and benefits.
- 35 percent cited dissatisfaction with potential career development.
- 32 percent said they were ready for a new experience.

HR professionals were asked which programs or policies they use currently to help retain employees. The following three are the most common programs employers are using to retain employees:

- 62 percent provide tuition reimbursement.
- 60 percent offer competitive vacation and holiday benefits.
- 59 percent offer competitive salaries.

Most HR professionals surveyed (71 percent), in large organizations (those with more than 500 employees), thought it would be extremely likely or somewhat likely to experience an increase in voluntary turnover once the job market improves. Forty-one percent from small organizations (1-99 employees) said it was extremely likely or somewhat likely that turnover would increase. Fifty-three percent of respondents from medium organizations (between 100 and 499) thought the same.

In addition to the three retention tips offered by HR professionals in the SHRM-CareerJournal.com survey, competitive salary, competitive vacation and holidays and tuition reimbursement, these are your key retention strategies. (If you think they read like the Golden Rule, you're right they do.) And, they're also common-sense, basic and incredibly hard to find in organizations today.

- Select the right people in the first place through behavior-based testing and competency screening. The right person, in the right seat, on the right bus is the starting point.
- Offer an attractive, competitive, benefits package with components such as life insurance, disability insurance and flexible hours.

- Provide opportunities for people to share their knowledge via training sessions, presentations, mentoring others and team assignments.
- Demonstrate respect for employees at all times. Listen to them deeply; use their ideas; never ridicule or shame them.
- Offer performance feedback and praise good efforts and results.
- People want to enjoy their work. Make work fun. Engage and employ the special talents of each individual.
- Enable employees to balance work and life. Allow flexible starting times, core business hours and flexible ending times. (Yes, his son's soccer game is important.)
- Involve employees in decisions that affect their jobs and the overall direction of the company whenever possible.
- Recognize excellent performance, and especially, link pay to performance.
- Base the upside of bonus potential on the success of both the employee and the company and make it limitless within company parameters. (As an example, pay ten percent of corporate profits to employees.)
- Recognize and celebrate success. Mark their passage as important goals are achieved.
- Staff adequately so overtime is minimized for those who don't want it and people don't wear themselves out.
- Nurture and celebrate organization traditions. Have a costume party every Halloween. Run a food collection drive every November. Pick a monthly charity to help. Have an annual company dinner at a fancy hotel.
- Provide opportunities within the company for cross-training and career progression. People like to know that they have room for career movement.
- Provide the opportunity for career and personal growth through training and education, challenge assignments and more.
- Communicate goals, roles and responsibilities so people know what is expected and feel like part of the in-crowd.
- According to research by the Gallup organization, encourage employees to have good, even best, friends, at work.

Now that you have the list, why not work to make your organization one of the few, the best, that truly honor and appreciate employees. If you treat your employees wonderfully, you will never lose them.