

3 ways to retain and engage your valuable employees



Joel Garfinkle · August 19, 2013 · Leadership · Inspiring Others

Valuable [in-demand leaders](#) are what turn a company from good to great. An organization's most important asset is its talented, high-performing employees. Companies that prioritize [retaining valued employees](#) understand retention's direct impact on their success.

To maintain the company's greatness, it must commit and invest resources in the vast pool of quality talent across the company. The most effective way to maintain a competitive advantage in today's marketplace is to fully utilize your top performers. This will directly differentiate your company from its competition.

But how do you do this? Begin to implement these three strategies today:

1. Think outside the job. [Motivated employees](#) want a challenge. They are anxious to contribute to projects outside of their specific job descriptions. Look around you. How many people do you see who are underutilized? Who could contribute something more than they currently do? Take steps to evaluate your peoples' skills, talent and experience. Ask them what they want and tap into this valuable talent bank.

Case study: Brenda, a mid-level marketing manager, was assigned the job of coming up with a new ad campaign utilizing social media. Steve, a company sales rep with extensive social media interest and experience, continually volunteered to help. But that wasn't his job, and Brenda hired a team of outside consultants to create the campaign. Steve was so disheartened by the company's lack of interest in utilizing his talents that he put his resume out on the street and within a few weeks he accepted an offer from one of the company's competitors.

What did it cost the company? Probably close to 100% of Steve's compensation package in hard costs. Intangible costs are harder to figure, but could include a costly candidate search; the expense of training Steve's replacement; loss of his knowledge and skills; and of course the mourning time and insecurity of his coworkers.

2. Practice total transparency. When you wonder why people are [leaving your company](#), look up. People leave their managers far more often than they leave the company. It's critically important that [managers give their team members](#) clear expectations and consistently open communications. When the manager fails to show employees a clear pathway to growth and success, it makes employees feel uncertain and undervalued.

Case study: Jill loved her job as an IT manager but David, the company VP and her boss, was a puzzle. He was nice enough, but Jill was totally stressed out by his lack of communication. She had no idea where she stood or where she was headed. Eventually she left the company in frustration -- and for a lower paying job. At her exit interview, she told HR what she wasn't getting: clarity about David's expectations, specifics about her earning potential and future with the company and frequent [feedback about her performance](#).

In the absence of free and open communication, people will assume the worst -- that the company doesn't value them and has no plans for their future success.

3. Hand out the Oscars. Your people want to [feel rewarded, recognized and appreciated](#). Frequent "thank yous" go a long way. Even better -- acknowledge people publicly for specific accomplishments. Brag about them to your boss, or even to your boss' boss. Of course people appreciate monetary rewards, bonuses and [raises](#). However, these have more impact when they are tied to specific milestones and accomplishments. In a tough economy with high unemployment in many sectors, it's easy to get complacent about compensation and figure your people will hang around because they need a job. Don't do it! Keep up with the compensation statistics in your industry and make sure you're paying competitive salaries, maybe just a bit better than the industry average.

Case study: Matt, the president of a small manufacturing company, prided himself on having a casual, friendly, fun work environment. He wanted his workers to feel relaxed and to [enjoy coming to work every day](#). He instituted pizza Fridays and bowling tournaments and felt he had a loyal, productive workforce. But lately he'd been hearing a little undercurrent of grumbling and complaints. So he called everyone together for an informal rap session.

That's how he learned that several other companies in his industry had just given their employees a 20% across the board salary increase. Matt wanted to be fair, but he also wanted to pay for performance. He asked the employees to create a task force and to come up with a new salary structure that would reward people for reaching specific personal and company goals.

A motivated, productive workforce doesn't just happen. It takes constant vigilance to remain aware of industry trends as well as the attitudes and needs of your employees. Awareness is the first step toward engaging and retaining your greatest asset -- your people.

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