

WORKPLACE MATTERS

Employers should work to keep top performers

Focusing your efforts on your lowest performers can be a hard habit to break, and one that could cost your company in the long run. By focusing on your top talent, you'll lessen the chances of losing them, thereby boosting the bottom line.



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Recent surveys conducted by Robert Half International showed that even in a slow economy, top performers consider career changes if they feel they aren't valued at their organization.

Employee retention is critical to the long-term health of a business. Retaining the best employees ensures customer satisfaction, product sales, satisfied co-workers, effective succession planning and embedded organizational knowledge.

Here are four steps to retain top talent:

- 1. Be clear about goals and expectations:** When employees understand the goals and expectations, they are more engaged.
- 2. Provide development opportunities:** Discuss with employees their career aspirations, short and long term, and explore opportunities to prepare them for advancement. When employees develop to their potential, they become excited about work.
- 3. Give meaningful feedback on a regular basis:** Real-time feedback helps people improve.
- 4. Reward, recognize and appreciate:** Use positive reinforcement to gain desired behavior.

"Retention begins before you hire someone," said Liz Cawood, president of CAWOOD, a local marketing company. "Take time to make sure every person you interview understands your culture, how your team interacts and your expectations for the job that you are filling. After you've made the hire, stay in touch with the

new employee. Make sure the individual is challenged and has opportunities to continue to grow."

In many companies, top performers outperform lower performers by at least three to four times, and it's usually easier to double revenues generated by top performers than revenues produced by lower performers. Yet, managers spend a disproportionate amount of time with the lower performers because they feel that low performers need more attention.

Another reason to focus more attention on your top performers is that they can, and will, look for work elsewhere if they are unhappy.

Robert Half found that 44 percent of employees are more inclined to look for opportunities outside of their employer as a result of how they were treated during the recent downturn. And according to a recent study by the Corporate Executive Board, 25 percent of top performers plan to change jobs within the next 12 months. By comparison, that number was 10 percent in 2008. If you don't support your top performers, they will look for a company that will support them.

Turnover among top performers is costly. Research suggests that direct replacement costs can reach as high as 50 to 60 percent of an employee's annual salary, with total costs associated with turnover ranging from 90 to 200 percent of the employee's annual salary. (To calculate how much turnover will cost your business go to www.cepr.net/calculators/turnover_calc.html.)

People don't just come to work because they want money. They also want opportunities. High performers, regardless of the economy, continually strive to achieve better results. Be sure you give them that opportunity.

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