

10

Low-Cost Steps to Keep Employees from Job Hunting

I recently read an on-line newsletter from a senior position recruitment firm that because of the high turnover rate of senior managers, even non-tech oriented companies were beginning to offer signing bonuses, salaries of more than \$100,000 and stock options for middle managers. In addition, a newspaper career counselor recently advised a reader that unless you had an employment contract, nine months was long enough for a job.

It was noted that if you move it should be for more than just money. It should be for a better company fit, for skills enhancement and that the move fit into the your career game plan.

The employment rules today are ... there are very few rules. There's no longer a stigma attached to people who have had three or four job changes in the last few years. That's good news for people who want to "shop." It's bad news for companies.

Senior executives know that 60-80 percent of the organization's inventory leaves thru the front door every evening. Every time part of that inventory doesn't return it costs dearly to replace the individual. Since no one has unlimited staffing budgets employee retention is the best way to keep your largest cost under control.

The primary motivation for individuals who are job hunting seldom is simply a bigger paycheck. There are low-cost efforts you can undertake to retain the people you want to keep.

1,2 Flexible hours and telecommuting. Increasingly executives are realizing that offering flexible hours and telecommuting are the most cost-effective ways to hire new good people and retain present personnel. The combination of flex time and flex place are inexpensive and convenient.

Many times it also makes better use of your overall physical and fiscal resources.

Managers are realizing they can focus on the best possible person for the job regardless of where he or she lives. They eliminate the high cost and personal disruption and concerns that surrounds relocation. This is especially true for companies in New York City or California, where housing costs and daily commutes are more than some people want to confront.

With telecommuters, companies also don't have to pay for office space, parking and commuting costs. In many instances the savings can be substantial.

More than 60 percent of the nation's firms have increased the number of telecommuters over the past two years. According to AT&T's *National Survey of Teleworker Attitudes and Work Styles*, more than 60 percent of the respondents felt telecommuting was positive for their careers. Sixty-two percent found no difference in working at home and 15 percent felt more connected to their workgroups. Seventy-one percent were more satisfied with their jobs after they began working at home.

In making the move, companies must outline the location and hours of work, who owns the equipment and who's responsible for repairs. Many firms find that with Internet connectivity people are not only more productive when they work off-site but they actually put in longer hours. The individual's commute is only 15 steps rather than more than 15 miles and people can focus all of their attention on the task rather than routine office interruptions.

3 Praise. It sounds extremely simple but with reduced staffs, increased workload and compressed time schedules, it is easy to forget compliments. While some people are self-reliant and self-assured, it is amazing what a few well-chosen words can do. People need to know that their efforts for the company are recognized and appreciated.

This is especially true for junior people who may be taking on projects or activities for the first time. Each success should be acknowledged so the individuals will grow and have the confidence they are growing personally and professionally. However, don't overdo it and don't spread the praise around so much that it becomes meaningless.

4 Employees training employees. Firms spend hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars each year conducting formal training sessions. For some of the skill sets, formal training is a must.

However, increasingly organizations find that it is not only more cost-efficient but also more effective to have employees teach each other. The company's most valuable resource is its people; leverage

implementation projects, but these programs and projects often are given to the same few "stars." The high-potential types get the projects because management wants to make certain the effort succeeds. As a result some members of the team never get the chance to stretch themselves and grow.

If you find this occurring, use the team approach with teams made up of senior and junior personnel. Keep in mind that even your best staff members aren't good at everything. Sometimes they can learn from new members in the team. As individuals develop a broader range of understanding and expertise let them lead teams on new projects. This keeps people from being pigeonholed or left out so they cease to grow.

It's up to corporate and department managers to use low-cost incentives to keep people from looking for a new job.

their experience, capabilities and technical/work expertise. Mentoring allows seasoned professionals to not only share theory but also "real world" experience. This often is more valuable than classroom instruction.

It helps both the trainer and the trainee. The trainer gains recognition for his or her technical or business expertise. The trainees gain insights into practical applications and knowledge they can confidently and immediately use.

5 Clear career paths. Let employees know the company's and department's plans for the next one, three and five years. Identify opportunities for people. Explain what is required for them to move forward in the organization. Without a clear-cut understanding of what they have to do to advance, people quickly become demotivated. At that point they begin looking for "better" opportunities.

6 Work with cutting-edge technology. Every organization advocates letting people work on special or new technology

7 Shield your people. Whether clients are internal or external, one of senior management's most important jobs is to manage and control the interaction between "clients" and staff. Senior managers should be the lightning rod that shields others in the team so they can focus on their work.

Because your work is an inexact science at best, occasionally things will go awry despite the best plans and individual efforts. When this happens, it's the manager's responsibility to not only defend staff personnel but also take the heat. Once the problem is solved or resolved, the individual(s) involved can be counseled on how the situation could have been avoided or corrected so the problem is avoided in the future.

8 Emphasize benefits package value. If your company offers good benefits, make certain employees know the value of those benefits above and beyond their weekly or monthly paychecks. Depending on the company, benefits can be 20-30 percent of their total compensation.



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In addition, you may want to consider adding or offering benefits that cost very little or nothing. Noncash incentives can be a key means of retaining people. The right mixture of these incentives often helps keep employees and often keeps them from leaving just for an increase in his or her salary. Days off with pay at the completion of a major project, paying for attending conferences and educational/informational seminars, flex time, childcare, wellness credits, corporate or departmental health club sponsorship and similar benefits can do a lot to keep people from considering job offers.

9 Supportive culture. Recognizing birthdays, anniversaries and special occasions as well as impromptu parties for the completion of a major project is a cultural activity that says "you're important" and "you matter." Little things can build big loyalty. However, when this cultural support comes down as a corporate edict, it often is ineffective.

10 Small gifts, cash prizes. Small, impromptu gifts such as sporting event tickets, free meals, theater tickets and on-the-spot cash awards of \$25-\$50 is a way for department managers to recognize an individual's accomplishments or contributions to the organization. But since incentive awards have become commonplace they often can lose their effect. When the awards are given, combine them with public recognition.

The football tickets or dinner aren't important to professional staff members and certainly won't keep them from taking a better job offer. However, receiving the recognition in front of their peers can build team and organization loyalty.

When the big offers come they can force people to consider a move. It's up to corporate and department managers to use as many of the low-cost incentives as possible to keep people from looking for a new job or cut off overtures at the outset. Low-cost incentives should be part of your total compensation program. Don't take them for granted or you'll continually be hiring and training new people. Constant replacement is far more expensive than the incentives. **WQP**

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continued from page 23

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Flowmatic Systems, Inc., Dunnellon, FL
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systems, countertop RO systems, filter membranes, test kits and flow controls. Topway Global, Inc., Brea, CA Write in 1126

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Write in 1137

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