

How to Attract and Retain Great Employees

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Organizations that attract and retain great employees (Talent Magnets) satisfy the key human needs that influence performance and loyalty.

What Are People Looking For?

1. Pride In Where They Work and What They Do

Companies that produce mediocre products or provide poor service have difficulty attracting and retaining excellent workers, regardless of how generous their benefits and compensation package. Employee pride also comes from observing management making decisions that show a clear understanding of what is going on “in the trenches.”

2. Meaning and Purpose

Meaningful work brings workers alive in a way a generous benefits package cannot.

Talent Magnet organizations address this issue by:

- Having a mission and a vision that captures the hearts and souls of their workforce.
- Continuously communicating their mission and vision to their people.
- Communicating the important role each employee has in making the vision a reality.
- Giving employees the tools and freedom to make a difference in the company.
- Letting employees hear “the voice of the customer,” to help them stay connected to the bigger picture.

3. Appreciation

Showing genuine appreciation is simple, inexpensive, and tremendously effective. Research shows that appreciation is one of the strongest, if not the strongest, employee motivator. How do you show appreciation?

- Saying “Thanks for doing a great job.”
- Sending “thank you” notes to employees who have done a great job or gone the extra mile.
- Giving gift certificates to dinner, the movies, or some other small token of appreciation. It’s not the “prize” that matters as much as the underlying message “We don’t take you for granted. We notice the good things you do.”

Managers at Talent Magnet companies are careful not to confuse prizes, awards, and Employee Appreciation Days with genuine, ongoing, person-to-person displays of appreciation. Gimmicks can create cynicism and decrease motivation. Personal expressions of appreciation tap into one of the most powerful human needs and motivators.

4. Opportunities To Learn and Grow

When work allows employees to use their minds, acquire new skills, and face situations that invite them to grow, they come alive. Talent Magnet organizations address this fundamental need by providing their employees with ongoing learning opportunities through formal training, cross-training, and assigning employees projects and responsibilities that cause them to stretch.

While management at other organizations view training as a luxury they can't afford or don't have the time for, managers at Talent Magnet organizations see it as investment in attracting, retaining, and growing a world class workforce.

5. Respect

Managers at Talent Magnet organizations realize that every management action, response, or communication conveys a message about how much management respects or doesn't respect its employees. Simple demonstrations of respect that make a big difference in how employees feel about their employer include:

- Not requiring employees to ask permission for every minor decision.
- Saying "Would you..." rather than "You should..." or "You need to..." when assigning tasks.
- Soliciting input from people on the front line.
- Asking for employees' input on how they feel about the organization and the way they are managed, and then responding to the feedback.
- Recognizing that employees have a life outside of work.

Why Do So Few Companies Do These Things?

Since these needs are so basic and so obvious, why are they so often not met by companies? Some of the reasons include:

1. Time Pressure

Managers are often so time pressured and so focused on putting out fires, they incorrectly believe they don't have time to work on the "soft issues" related to the human side of business.

2. Lack of Awareness

When people are promoted to the managerial level because of their technical prowess but lack effective interpersonal skills or an understanding of human nature, they are more likely to dismiss the human side of attraction and retention as "touchy feely" or just plain irrelevant.

3. Arrogance

Many companies show the same arrogance toward their employees as they do to their customers. They assume they know better than their customers and their employees about what would satisfy them and don't bother to find out if they're correct. If they do ask and the feedback isn't positive, they dismiss it as irrational and impertinent.

4. “Quick Fixitis”

If managers can order an Employee Appreciation Day or an Employee of the Month award, they can remove “Implement Attraction and Retention Program” from their “to do” list.

Quick fixes and gimmicky approaches to attraction and retention aren't effective and can even have the opposite effect. Because people are very sensitive to insincerity, workers are quick to notice a disconnect between staged events and the day-to-day treatment they receive by their manager and the organization as a whole.

The Importance of Listening to Employees

Assuming customers are happy without asking them if you're right is a surefire way to lose customers – and employees. Talent Magnet organizations don't assume that what they are doing is working. They are constantly engaging in conversations with their workforce through employee satisfaction surveys, anonymous suggestion boxes, company-wide meetings, focus groups, and informal conversations. Also, they work at creating a culture where honesty and openness is supported so that employees feel safe enough to voice their concerns.

1. Identify From Your Own Experience What Works and What Doesn't Work

When people compare their own experiences at positive and negative workplaces or compare their best and worst bosses, they find it difficult to deny the huge impact organizational culture and management practices have on performance and loyalty.

2. Recognize The Importance of Management Development

How employees feel about their organization is profoundly influenced by how they feel about their boss. When employees have a boss who is respectful, inspiring, and appreciative, it's hard not to be loyal. Therefore, management development is a wise investment for any organization seeking to maximize its ability to attract and retain the best of the best.

3. Ask Yourself Tough Questions

Creating a Talent Magnet Organization requires courageous self-examination by management at all levels about how well they lead and about the kind of organization they have created. This process of engaging in self-examination and engaging employees in honest conversation about how well the company is run can yield critical information about what steps need to be taken to transform an organization into a Talent Magnet.

Is Your Organization a Talent Magnet?

The following questions can help you begin the process of exploring if you are doing the things that create a Talent Magnet organization. To effectively answer these questions requires feedback from employees. Without their input, all answers are merely conjecture.

Some Questions to Ask:

1. How do our people feel about being here?
2. Are we the kind of organization that inspires pride?
3. Are the products and/or services that we bring to the marketplace and the operational decisions we make worthy of pride?
4. Do we have a compelling mission and vision, and do we “walk our talk”?
5. Do we communicate our mission and vision to employees, and do we communicate how they contribute to it?
6. Do we work with employees to design their jobs so they are as meaningful and intrinsically satisfying as possible?
7. Do our employees feel appreciated?
8. Do we believe that training is important, and are we acting accordingly?
9. Do we provide opportunities for employees to grow by taking on more responsibility and developing new skills on the job, and could we provide more?
10. Do employees feel respected?
11. Are we open to feedback about how we manage, or do we assume that what we’re doing is right, and it’s employees’ job to adapt to us?
12. If I worked for me, how would I feel about being here?
13. Do we try to get the most work out of each employee, regardless of the toll it takes on them and on the quality of their work?
14. Do we show respect for employees’ life outside of work?
15. Can employees discuss openly with management their work/life balance needs?
16. Do we have a workplace environment where people generally have fun and enjoy each other’s company?
17. Can people be open and honest about how they feel and what they think?