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Decreasing Employee Turnover in Inexpensive Ways

Exit interviews tell it all: “no one cares”, “my supervisor is a jerk!”, “nobody around here listens”. The reasons for quitting a job go on and on. So does the cost to replace employees who quit. Finding, motivating and retaining quality employees are today a distributor’s biggest challenge. The reasons are many—low unemployment, a more mobile workforce, unacceptable wage and benefits levels and feelings of not being recognized or appreciated. The focus of this Bulletin concerns the latter or what are the non-monetary ways we as business owners or managers can use to insure our people feel understood and valued? The following thoughts come to mind:

Get people involved.

People want to feel a part of what’s going on in their work function. They want to have a say in what work will be done, the sequence of the work, and how it will be accomplished. They want to have input into changes in their work environment, scheduling, and even the hiring of new employees.

More and more, we’re going to find that people want a more meaningful role on the job. This will apply particularly to your better employees; they will have a greater contribution to make and will be even more eager to participate in the decision-making process.

When people want to get involved, and they are not allowed the opportunity, they become alienated toward management and toward the organization. This, obviously, can lead to people leaving the company. For some, being directly involved in the management of their work is highly important.

Soliciting someone’s opinion does not necessarily mean you will follow that person’s advice or preference. You can show you care by asking for input, but the ultimate decisions are still yours to make. That’s part of your job as a manager.

Appreciate routine work.

Workers who want recognition (all of us want to be appreciated) often think they have to do something extraordinary to get attention. Unfortunately, they are usually correct. Most supervisors seem to notice only when people do something exceptionally good or exceptionally bad.

Some of your most valuable people, frequently overlooked, are the folks who come in every day, don’t bother anyone, and get their work done in a reliable, routine way. You can depend on them to be productive. They are probably the very foundation of your organization.

Other people on your team may be involved in some special assignment work, but are still counted on to take care of some routine tasks that “somebody has to do” to keep things running.

The performance of that routine work is important to your operations. If it were not done, you could be in serious trouble.

Every once in a while, take time out to thank those people who usually don’t get thanked. Show some appreciation for the routine work done by members of your team in addition to the more exciting parts of their jobs.

Give specifics in performance feedback.

Good people want to know specifically how they are doing and how they can improve.

Interestingly, many supervisors seem reluctant to be specific, offering generalized feedback and evaluations instead.

As you talk with your employees about their performance, include specific examples to illustrate what you like or dislike about what the employee does. With an understanding of what you want and don't want, your team member can make definitive modifications to satisfy you.

The days of "gee, you're wonderful" performance appraisals are gone in excelling organizations. Today's enlightened managers give their people the information needed to meet expectations. Everyone working for these communicative leaders understands what tasks are to be done, how they are to be accomplished, and when work is to be finished. Employers, managers, employees—everybody wins.

Have a sense of humor.

"Take your work seriously, but don't take yourself too seriously." This old adage is meaningful for us in today's working environment. We have to take what we do seriously. With the "lean machine" staffing philosophy in most companies, everyone has a significant amount of important work to do. However, we can have fun while we work. Happy, relaxed employees are more productive. They work well in an environment with less stress and the enhanced camaraderie. Most people are basically happy and positive, enjoying life. The same feelings should be experienced at work.

Celebrate birthdays, promotions, and other special events with short parties. Lunch together with fellow workers, a piece of cake, sharing the moment builds teamness and positive feelings about work. Inexpensive

funny gifts can add a lot toward the enjoyment. The celebrations do not have to be long at all; just a short period of fun together can go a long way.

Equip people to be productive.

Give people the tools they need to get their jobs done. Waiting in line to use a photocopy machine can inhibit productivity and build dissatisfaction. Not having the right tool to adjust a machine or a broken down delivery truck can cost time and people.

Good people want to work. They want to do a good job. Give them what they need to perform at peak performance and they will give you the results you seek. Make their work more difficult, and you may soon be replacing them.

Get rid of "Mickey Mouse" stuff!

Good people become quickly frustrated by "Mickey Mouse" rules, regulations, and procedures. People don't want to put up with nonsensical rules and regulations. Take a good look at your policies and procedures. Look for anything that might call for extra paperwork, unnecessary steps, superfluous approvals, or similar nuisances. Slash red tape. Destroy burdensome bureaucracy. Cut the harnesses. Get the clutter out of the way. Remove anything that may be an obstacle to the effective and efficient operation of your business.

Do whatever you need to do to make it easy for your people to get things done. Your streamlining efforts will probably make it easier for your customers to do business with you, too.

Support formal education.

Provide financial support to those employees interested in continuing their formal education.

Their interest may be in a trade school, undergraduate college courses, or graduate courses at a university. While some distributors limit their support to what they consider to be job-related courses, there are some other approaches to take.

You may want to offer a stronger degree of support for job-related courses than you do for courses that don't relate directly to the employee's work, but do contribute to a degree in the field. Be careful about being too narrow in your approach. While employees are learning about subjects that are not specifically job-related, they are also strengthening their self-discipline and self esteem.

When they complete the curriculum and graduate, they may suddenly become more marketable because they have the degree. Be wise and keep their loyalty by supporting the achievement of their career goals.

Reference: Herman, Roger E., Keeping Good People. Oakhill Press Company

As one may see from the previous discussion, distributor managers can do much to empower and motivate their workforce. Any outlay of cash in doing so should be considered as an investment in its people and not just another overhead expense. The returns can far exceed any costs incurred. As an added feature, this month's Bulletin includes a morale measuring checklist developed by noted business consultant and author, Richard Hadden. His best selling book "Contented Cows Give Better Milk" was the topic of a workshop during this past NWSA Annual Convention. Hadden's practical insights on recognizing, rewarding and motivating employees were well received by distributor representatives in attendance. I hope you can implement some of his suggestions.

Remember! Improving the work environment can cost very little if we just:

- ✓ care
- ✓ communicate
- ✓ celebrate accomplishments

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Things Employers Can Offer That Cost Little

By Richard Hadden

Note: Mr. Hadden presented these ideas during his October 4, 1999 workshop at the NWSA Annual Convention in New Orleans. Several members found this list worthwhile.

Activity	Do Already	Should Consider	Will Do!	Does Not Apply	Can't Do
Very Inexpensive					
Flexible Work Schedules					
Granting Autonomy (Empower Your Employee)					
Casual Dress Code (Fridays Or Every Day)					
Professional Accreditation					
Extended Parental Leave					
Job Rotation					
Good Opportunity For Career And Skill Development					
Sabbaticals					
Stable Employment Reputation (Not Prone To Layoffs)					
Allow Vacation Without "Being Available"					
Friendly Atmosphere					
Managers Provide Candid, Meaningful Feedback					
Open Communication Between Managers & Employees					
Childcare Referral Assistance					
Other Educational Support					
Know Everyone's Name					
Flextime					
Telecommuting					
Celebrate Company Wide Things Worth Celebrating					
Requires Some Expense					
External Conferences & Seminars					
Managerial Training					
Pay For Performance					
Fully Funded Health Benefits					
Interpersonal Skills Training					
Technical Training					
Employability Training					
Fitness Benefit (Onsite Facilities Or Paid/Subsidized Membership Elsewhere)					

Activity	Do Already	Should Consider	Will Do!	Does Not Apply	Can't Do
Financial Planning Assistance Benefit					
Stock Grants/ESOP's					
Employer Contribution To 401(K)					
Onsite Or Subsidized Offsite Childcare					
Matching Charitable Contributions					
Legal Assistance Benefit					
Pay For Volunteer Work					
Concierge Services					
Elder Care Assistance					
Structured Reward & Recognition Program					
Tickets As Rewards; Have A Choice					
After Meeting Some Tough Challenges, Treat Everyone To Pizza					