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WHITE PAPER

Improve Retention by Being a Better Manager

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> Improve Retention by **Being a Better Manager**

It's hard to find good employees...and EXPENSIVE to lose them. HR experts estimate that replacing an employee costs two to seven times that individual's annual salary, and in the chemical industry top talent can be even more expensive to replace.

So what can you do to ensure you keep your very best R&D, engineering, and chemists happy and improve retention? The answer may lie in the findings of some recent studies that indicate that 70% to 80% of turnover is caused by management conflict.

Boss-related turnover is a significant problem. It's especially acute in departments where managers have come up from the professional or technical ranks and may not always possess the necessary people skills to be effective leaders.

Whether your organization is staffed with seasoned, first-rate managers or individuals who are still developing, cultivating the five behaviors outlined below will improve their leadership abilities and reduce turnover in the process.



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Wayne Outlaw, author of *Smart Staffing*

Good Managers Communicate with Their Employees

What’s the biggest complaint employees have with their managers? The answer is lack of communication. Keeping open lines of communication—at all times—is essential. The workplace hates a vacuum, and when information is non-existent, the grapevine will usually fill the void—often with misinformation. Failing to communicate, incomplete communication, or worse, misinformation, yields distrust and discontent.

In addition to communicating company status information, it’s critical that you clearly communicate employee job duties and performance expectations. Everyone on your team should be provided with clear, measurable, and documented job responsibilities. Whether it’s project tasks or annual goals, every employee must know exactly what you expect of them. And don’t wait for an annual review to provide feedback on both successes and shortcomings. Such communication goes a long way to preventing conflicts and misunderstandings in the workplace—and that means you’ll have a happier, more stable workforce.

Of course, listening is an equally important communication skill. Listen to your employees’ wants, needs, and suggestions—and demonstrate you’ve listened by responding to each one. When one employee confided that she was dissatisfied with current job challenges, her boss took immediate action. He sent her to training classes that prepared her for the next rung on the career ladder. Not only did the employee end up staying, she was promoted within several months.

Good Managers Trust and Respect Their Employees

As Wayne Outlaw, author of *Smart Staffing*, rightly points out, “You can demand obedience because of your rank, but you have to earn trust and respect.” And the only way to accomplish that is to show trust and respect to your employees. Many bosses fail in this effort because of their need to micromanage. In particular, managers who are used to keeping tight reign on their projects, sometimes find it difficult to give their staff the freedom to succeed.

In one instance, a manager working for a major chemical company needed such a ridiculous level of control over his staff, that it caused a major disruption to the departmental workflow. This particular manager insisted that all of his engineers check in with him every hour so he could remain in constant contact with them. This boss would frequently interrupt his employees, demanding that they drop everything when he called them. Not surprisingly, turnover in his department was high.

Provide your employees with necessary information and support, but trust them to do their jobs successfully; no competent employee likes to be micromanaged when it’s not necessary. By being a guide rather than a dictator, your chances of retaining staff greatly increase.

Good Managers Mentor Their Employees

Your obvious duty as a mentor is to take an active interest in the professional development of your staff. Encourage them to take training classes, introduce them to potential allies in the company or chemical industry, and help them map out their own career paths. The easier you make it for employees to advance professionally, the more likely they'll stay with your department or organization.

On a more general level, mentoring means putting the best interests of your employees above everything else—even if you have to question company policy occasionally. One manager asked for and received permission to give each member of his team a raise above the stated maximum because they had completed a critical project successfully. Such shows of support can dramatically increase your staff's loyalty and retention rate.

Good Managers Care about Their Employees

If you view employees merely as workplace resources, you'll always battle retention problems. It's essential to support and value your staff as people, especially during times of personal crisis. The work/life balance is difficult under the best circumstances, but when an employee is dealing with situations like illness, death, or divorce, he or she needs to know you are an ally.

You may worry that people will use personal misfortunes as an excuse to take advantage of the company. But good

employees have no desire to ruin their work reputations. The following story serves as a good example. Shortly after beginning a new job, one man learned that his mother was admitted to intensive care with a serious illness. His boss was completely sympathetic, encouraging the employee to come and go so he could see his mother during the short visiting hours. The employee never forgot this act of kindness, and 10 years later, he is still with the same boss. By giving employees sufficient latitude during troubled times, you can earn their commitment for the long term.

Good Managers Motivate Their Employees

Everyone can be motivated, just not in the same way. One employee works hard to be promoted, another for bigger bonuses, and yet another for the sense of accomplishment. You can provide perks ranging from recognition awards to achievement bonuses. Yet if these "benefits" are not valued by your staff, they're worthless. Your challenge is to find out what motivates each individual, and then help him or her to attain that objective.

Communicate with your staff on a regular basis to find out what they want. One manager hands out index cards to team members at each quarterly review meeting. Employees then write down the workplace benefits they desire, as well as any issues that might cause them to leave. By collecting this information, he finds it easier to keep his staff content and productive.

Are You a Good Boss?

Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans authors of 'Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay' have come up with a helpful list of questions that will help you determine if you're doing everything possible as a boss to retain your good employees.

- Do I realize that I am mainly responsible for retaining the talent on my team?
- Do I inquire about how to make work more satisfying for my employees?
- Do I know my employees' career ambitions?
- Do I respect the work/life balance issues my employees face?
- Do I make my employees aware of the ways they can develop and grow their careers?
- Do I introduce my employees to others within my internal and external network?
- Do I encourage my employees to work actively on their own development?
- Am I committed to my employees and value their contributions?
- Do I support the work-related interests of my employees?
- Do I question and bend the rules to support my employees?
- Do I recognize and reward my employees' accomplishments in a variety of ways?
- Do I provide my employees as much choice as possible on how work gets done?
- Do I tell my employees where they stand and what they need to do to improve?
- Do I take time to listen to and really understand my employees?
- Do I take the initiative to learn what my employees value?

> Invest Now or Pay Later

Becoming a good boss takes hard work—sharing ideas with other managers, talking candidly with your employees, even receiving some leadership training from a qualified consulting firm. But it's your best bet for assembling and retaining a team of great people. And finally, the effort spent is much less costly than a chronic turnover problem.



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