

Boom or Bust: Can You Afford to Lose Talented Employees?

1.) Quick Quote To Consider

"Your first and foremost job as a leader is to take charge of your own energy and then to help orchestrate the energy of those around you." Peter F. Drucker

2.) Boom Or Bust: Can You Afford To Lose Talented Employees?

Bust or boom you can't afford to lose talented employees. No one knows this better than Mike O'Hara, President of AB&C Group — a premier response processing and fulfillment company with two in-bound call centers in West Virginia and Virginia. Mike has a history of investing in his employees and encouraging their personal and professional growth. In 2000, Sheperdstown College recognized his contributions with an Honorary Ph.D for his commitment to education.

Mike is always looking for ways to improve his company, so he requested Northwood Consulting meet with him and April Funkhouser (Director of Relationship Call Centers) to discuss how they could improve retention in their two call centers.

To establish a benchmark for measuring change, Northwood administered a 12 Question Survey to measure Employee Satisfaction before it started a 3-day workshop series interspersed with 6 telesessions and homework between sessions with two groups of the management team. Over the next 7 months the team learned:

- how to adapt communication styles to each employee
- to be a better listener
- how to design powerful conversations
- ways to get agreements and set expectations
- different methods for motivating employees by his or her individual preferences
- how to create a fun, energetic and productive atmosphere within the call centers in order to develop more dedicated staff
- how to work together as a team to create change.

The managers also formed four problem-solving groups to identify possible actions they could take to improve retention. After gathering facts about employee retention and identifying other possible factors that may be affecting it, they identified multiple solutions and then each group chose one to implement. In choosing the solution, they analyzed the impact on employees and the values of the company. Here are a few initiatives they developed and are implementing today:

1. Since turnaround is highest within the first 90 days of employment within the industry, a Buddy Program was developed. Star employees are paired with new hires to answer questions, show them the ropes and to introduce them to others. The goal is to make the hires as comfortable as soon as possible. Within the first three months of the program, they have seen a 37% improvement in new hire retention.



2. A Senior Buddy Program was designed to educate staff about the business and provide employees more learning opportunities. An employee would shadow a manager and observe her for a day.

3. To establish good relationships with managers and new hires immediately, a Meet and Greet program was developed. Each supervisor and manager spends time with each new hire class. They introduce themselves to the class and announce they are available anytime to answer questions. The managers then make themselves very visible during the training by checking in with each new hire.

4. To help the staff enjoy their time at work, increase productivity and just be excited about coming to work daily, teams developed on-going, sporadic motivation programs for both call centers. After conducting a survey of the Customer Service Representatives (CSR) as to what motivates them, each team developed fun activities, contests and team building events to help eliminate stress common in call centers. From developing a U.S. flag with each CSR's name on a star to organizing team lunches when performance goals are reached, management and CSRs have noticed a dramatic difference in the staff's attitudes and productivity.

Even before we re-administered the Employee Satisfaction Survey we were hearing stories about dramatic improvement in the relationships between the managers and the call center agents. April Funkhouser observed managers spending more time with the agents when they had questions. The managers reported new hires being more comfortable asking questions about the job. And there was an increase in fun. Each month there was a Wacky Week: Water Wednesday with water pistols, Footsie Friday included wearing PJ's and slippers, etc.

The Employee Satisfaction Survey saw a 7% increase in satisfaction over the 7 months. AB&C is now requiring all new managers and supervisors to complete the workshop series so they can maintain the improvement they've experienced in employee satisfaction.

According to Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman of the Gallup Organization in their book *First, Break All the Rules*, "Talented employees need great managers." Each employee's productivity is "determined by his relationship with his immediate supervisor."

With organizations struggling to increase profits in a challenging economy, can you afford to lose your star employees? Can you afford a decrease in employee productivity? Will you be prepared to compete when the economy turns around?