



# Finders, Keepers

Good employees are essential to success.  
Once you find them, hang on to them.

By Stephanie Fehr

IT'S DIFFICULT TO FIND THE RIGHT EMPLOYEES in the first place, and with other companies trying to expand their labor pool – often by luring talent away – having strategies in place to ensure your staff is satisfied takes on new importance. Factor in turnover costs – recruitment, selection and training new hires – and the negative effect high turnover has on employee morale, and the stakes are even higher.

With all that in mind, finding ways to keep employees is critical.

## Clear Communication

One of the key ways to ensure employees are engaged is to be clear about the company's purpose. "If you can get someone on board and sell them on the vision of the company – the culture, where the company is going – you can get somebody enthused and motivated, and that's a good way of retaining impact players," says TJ Hummer, Senior Account Manager with Management Recruiters of Iowa City. "It's important that the internal branding is consistent through all layers of management. Otherwise employees will see through it and think it is superficial."

Communication isn't a one-way street though. Employees should have the freedom to give a "performance evaluation" to the company, as well as being evaluated themselves. Vernon Trucano of AgriTalent Recruiters advises doing quarterly reviews instead of annual reviews. "You get to review what's on an employee's mind, what's making and keeping them happy," he says. "You keep your people happier by reviewing with them more often than just once a year. Instead of waiting a whole year to find out if something is wrong, you can deal with it right away."

## Good Managers

Part of this problem can be solved with having expert managers. "Research shows that employees stay because they have a good relationship with their manager," says Brian Bowman, Talent Acquisition Manager with Pioneer Hi-Bred. "So we work with managers and make sure they understand and own retention. You need open lines of communication with employees so that you can address what's most important to them. You might not be able to address all the needs, but you can usually address most of them."

Andy Armbruster, Field Sales Trainee Lead at Monsanto, agrees. "I come from an education background and there's an assumption that every great teacher will make a great principal, but the reality is sometimes the worst thing to do is put a great teacher in a principal's position," he says. "The same is true in our industry. Just because someone's a strong sales rep doesn't mean their talents are best used in management. You need someone who will take the time for the trainee. That's why we have train the trainer conferences, so managers understand their role."

## Individualized Attention

Working directly with the employee can also have positive retention effects. Some companies offer flexible working conditions, depending on individual considerations. "We know young people want to stay relatively close to home, so one of our goals is to keep trainees within a day's drive of where they went to school or where they grew up – which is easier said than done – but it's a goal," says Armbruster.

Depending on the situation, some employees may even be able to work from home. "We do that

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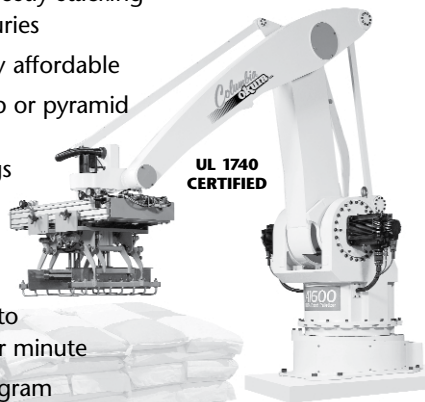


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on a limited basis," says Bowman. "Because of the nature of our work we don't always have that flexibility, but we certainly consider that an option for those positions that do." He adds that in some cases this has kept employees from looking for work elsewhere.

### Change through Challenge

Keeping employees challenged can also help you retain talent. "If someone is in a specific role for two to three years and good at what they do, they're going to get bored if a new challenge isn't thrown at them. That means they might be attracted when a recruiter calls," says Greg Duerksen of Kincannon & Reed, a management recruitment firm. "However, if someone is given something new to learn – it could be through a promotion or a lateral move – they'll find that intriguing."

Bowman agrees. "We look at the employee and their strengths, doing on-the-job training and expanding their responsibilities as required to help motivate them and give them new challenges," he says. "This is important because in some areas there isn't a direct career path."

Change has to have a purpose though. "We encourage our clients to give people opportunities to keep growing, progressing and being stretched," says Duerksen. "The best thing to do is give people a new challenge or new role, depending on the person, every two to five years." This is what talented people thrive on and keeps them committed – and keeps you, the employer, from always being in recruitment mode. **SW**

### Unusual Perks Offered by Some of Fortune's Best Companies to Work For

- Methodist Hospital System gave every employee a \$250 gas card in 2006
- Law firm Arnold & Porter offers \$15,000 if you recommend an employee they end up hiring
- Microsoft offers free grocery delivery, valet parking at work and a dollar-for-dollar match of employee charitable contributions (up to \$12,000)

Source: <http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/bestcompanies/2007/benefits/unusual.html>

### Top Tips

- Choose employees carefully – make sure they fit in with your company's culture
- Employees excited about the company's vision are more likely to stay
- Talk regularly with employees to find out what is working and what needs improvement
- Managers are an important part of a retention strategy – choose them carefully
- Tailor benefits to employees needs – matching 401(k) plans, telecommuting or limits on travel may work for different situations
- Offer challenges – bored employees leave