



The secret sauce of employee retention

By Hinda Mitchell

The past few years have taught leaders a lot about recruiting and retention. At the center of it is having a strong employee culture and creating a workplace where everyone thrives. I have an amazing employee who started with us right out of college and has advanced progressively to now be in a position of leadership within the firm. I asked them at one point why did they stay? The question was a way to understand the “secret sauce” that helped our talent grow within the firm, instead of leaving to grow and to replicate what I heard with our current team. Here is what they said:

Mentorship matters

Having people in the organization to look to for guidance, to bounce ideas off and to foster their growth is essential. That means giving employees a strong supervisor who will be their champion, answer their questions and give them space to learn. Create a job description with specific expectations for supervisors — and make sure they live it each day.

Provide access

At the risk of a humble brag, one thing that they shared was having access to me as an owner and leader. The lesson is that even your most junior employees deserve meaningful access to top leaders. They deserve opportunities to see how they work, to understand expectations and to learn by “osmosis.” Turns out, having an open-door policy where leaders are available to all is still the right thing to do.

Stretch them

Employees leave when they are not challenged and when they feel they are on their own looking for opportunities to try something new. Give employees stretch projects that position them to explore a new skill. Then, pair that with the tools and partners they need to get through that stretch project successfully. It is an important way to demonstrate your confidence in the employee and to be deliberate in introducing higher and better work opportunities for emerging professionals.

Trust them – and earn their trust

Though it may be cliché, trust is a two-way street. The employee must trust in the organization's management and leaders in all aspects of shaping their career. Likewise, an employee wants to feel trusted by that same management and leadership team. Do not take employees for granted and be intentional about activities that nurture trust and relationship-building.

Give them good work

The day-in and day-out appreciation of a job depends in part on having interesting, purposeful work to do. Diversity in work and the ability to feel that you are having an impact cannot be overstated. Develop their "reason for being" in their role. And for those projects that may not be as evidently rewarding or impactful, help them see the "why" behind the work they are doing.

Foster relationships

Employees spend a lot of time with their colleagues. Encourage connections that make the workplace — whether virtual or in-person — a fun place to be. Bring the team together not just for work but for fun. Be the place where work friendships thrive.

If you have not asked your long-term employees what got them to stay, it is worth doing so. While the answers may or may not surprise you, the ability to replicate what worked with current and future employees may be the difference-maker between attrition and retention.

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