

FINDING & KEEPING GOOD EMPLOYEES



**"THE EMPLOYER GENERALLY GETS THE EMPLOYEES HE DESERVES."
WALTER RALEIGH, SR.**

HOW DO YOU ATTRACT AND RETAIN TALENTED PEOPLE?

A growing number of companies are struggling with their inability to find and retain top talent. Costly turnover impacts an organization's bottom line, and its ability to compete in the marketplace. Visionary companies have discovered that their talent is their most valuable resource. A focused,



productive team can give an organization the needed advantage over organizations that may have the same cutting edge technologies, and much more capital. Therefore, forward thinking organizations have made the attraction and retention of viable workers one of their top priorities.

What, though, has led to the uphill battle that many organizations are experiencing when it comes to attracting and retaining good employees; a trend that many economic forecasters feel will continue in the coming decade? The convergence of several factors

has created our current workforce climate. A growing number of experts, politicians and educators are demanding that educational systems revamp their way of instructing tomorrow's workforce. This outcry is intended to curb a trend in which graduates are ill-prepared with the critical thinking and interaction skills needed to integrate seamlessly into the workforce. Additionally, many job candidates lack the technological savvy required by potential employers.

The "graying of our workforce" has also impacted the current drought of viable talent, as baby boomers (those born between 1946 and 1964) edge closer to traditional retirement age. Organization's whose tenured employees are able to retire well before the traditional retirement age are already feeling the harsh results of this phenomenon, on the horizon for the majority of the workforce. Baby boomers currently comprise 46% of the workforce and the first wave of this generation will have reached the age of retirement by 2011. Many employers wonder, with good reason, who will replace these knowledgeable employees. Generation X (those born between 1965 and 1983), the most obvious candidates, only comprise 29% of the current force. This will result in an inadequate amount of workers to meet the requirements of the workforce.

Generation X's inclination toward entrepreneurship has an increasing effect on the number of viable workers to replace retiring baby boomers. Heightened technology that is inexpensive and readily available makes business ownership the preferable option for many Gen Xers. The explosive growth of entrepreneurial efforts over the past decade is a trend that will most likely continue, further impacting employers' ability to find and keep good employees.

Decades of mergers, acquisitions, and downsizing has completely altered the current labor force's perception of company loyalty; they no longer expect to retire from their current employer, but rather view their current position as a stepping stone. This leaves many companies wondering how they can influence their top performers to progress within their organizations, instead of taking their investment of training and experience to a competitor. A company must first ask itself: what can we do to attract the type of talent that will give us a competitive advantage?

WHO ARE YOU REALLY?

What is your organization's vision, mission and purpose? How do these relate the goals that you have outlined for your organization and for your individual employees? Does your workforce know what your mission is, and how their individual performance relates to the company's overall success? Upon quizzing members of your organization regarding these basic and essential motivators you may discover that your organization lacks clarity. What impact will this have upon your effectiveness in the marketplace?



An organization whose members are unclear about its vision and mission, its plans and goals and their role in the achievement of these goals will lack focus, and efficiency. The overall effectiveness of the organization will suffer. Vagueness and uncertainty breeds a lack of accountability that can easily shipwreck an organization's ability to compete and its future success. How can your organization

demonstrate the clarity needed to become a talent magnet?

Ask yourself: Does your organization have a well-thought out vision? Have you clearly defined your goals and mapped out an actionable plan to achieve these goals? Does your executive team enthusiastically support your vision and goals? Have you clearly defined the role of each individual and department in the achievement of these goals? Does your executive team regularly communicate your vision and goals to your workforce? Is your company mission simply wall decoration, or does your management demonstrate this vision in its daily words and actions?

These are important considerations for a company that wants to become a talent magnet and retain its current high performers. Why? Employees who don't understand or clearly identify with a company's vision, mission and goals will likely feel baffled about their lack of progress in your organization. Without giving your employees clear, understandable tools to determine whether their performance is meeting the company's standards; an employer is dooming its employees to failure, and its organization by extension. What impact does this lack of clarity have on potential talent?

A well chosen vision and core ideology shapes the company's culture and is a stimulus for all decisions made regarding its culture and workforce. A well-defined portrait of who it is, where its going, who will get it there and how it will be accomplished serves as an important guide in such essential functions as personnel, training and leadership. This framework is an invaluable source as the company decides what type of employees it is seeking, not only in terms of hard skill sets, but in terms of soft or people skills.

Consider the fact that candidates are often hired because of their technological prowess or credentials; but it is usually their inability to fit into the organization's culture that causes their departure, either voluntarily, or involuntarily. Therefore, a growing number of organizations have discovered the need to take a more serious look at a candidate's ability to integrate into its culture. Many companies have invested in tools adapted to their particular organization that will help to determine whether a prospective candidate is a potentially good match. Finding talent that is well-suited to your organization and goals to begin with is an important first step in retaining them, once they are on board.

WELL-SUITED AND WELL-INFORMED

A company that has a clear, concise picture of who it is, what it wants to accomplish and who will get it there is in a good position. However, it must next assess its current workforce to identify skill gaps. This will help the organization to determine what hard skills are needed from its future workforce. However, the soft skills of new talent may play an even larger role in their ability to adapt to the organization's culture and support its mission. While today's markets demands ever increasing technological savvy, many employers have discovered that an applicant who is "a good fit" can easily be taught these skills. Conversely, an organization that hires talent with the right tech skills, but a complete inability to mesh with the organization or its core ideology is often vastly disappointed.



A growing wave of human resource experts believe that organizations deprive themselves of a host of viable applicants by demanding a laundry list of technological skills or educational credentials that may have much less of a bearing on the position than the person's inclination toward the values and core ideology of the organization. An executive team should carefully decide which hard skill sets are essential to the position they are attempting to fill. However, just as much weight should be given to finding a candidates with an enthusiastic propensity for the ideals that are key to your organization's vision and your company's culture.

The goal is not to force square pegs into round holes, but rather to find the talent that will easily fit into your open position and integrate with your current workforce and philosophy. For example, if a position requires extensive customer contact and engagement; hiring an introverted person who dislikes interaction with others is dooming that person to failure. Placing a person who lacks focus and organization in a position which requires strict adherence to deadlines, great attention to detail and other stringent requirements would be extremely bad judgement. But, how can a company determine whether potential talent will fit well with their organization, or in the particular position?

Armed with a list of desired traits and requirements developed by your management or human resource team an objective interview should be conducted. A variety of tests are being used by hiring professionals to help determine a potential candidate's personality traits and characteristics and how these compare with the needs of the organization.

Organizations often "overstate" the position, when in fact they are misleading the candidate. This tactic is often employed out of desperation; the interviewer feels that if they level with the applicant, they won't come aboard. However, such tactics inevitably backfire because the applicant is being set up for disappointment and resentment which will most likely lead to their departure, anyway. The time, money and effort that was spent to recruit and train the employee will now work to the advantage of another organization. Setting up realistic expectations about the organization and position may scare off some potential employees, but those who remain will be much better suited for the position.

An organization will be strengthened when it purposely seeks potential talent that balances its current strengths and weaknesses in both hard and soft skills and has a strong inclination toward the vision and values that have already been established. What, though, can you do to retain your talent?

BECOME AN “EMPLOYER OF CHOICE”



What type of reputation does your organization have? Not just among your customers or competitors but among your current and potential talent? Many organizations overlook the significance of this question. However, building a reputation as an “employer of choice” is an important step in attracting the talent that you seek. What steps are necessary to create the type of company culture that will have your current employees broadcasting the benefits of working for your firm?

There are many aspects to consider when answering the above questions. Generous compensation and benefits are usually the first factors that come to mind when pondering how a company can attract top talent. While these issues certainly play a role in drawing talent; they are not enough to attract and retain the type of talent needed to attain your organizations long-term goals.

Today’s workforce is seeking more than just monetary rewards. A growing number of top performers do not prescribe to the idea of sacrificing their personal lives and families for “the fast track” or huge salaries. Instead they want meaningful work in an environment where they feel appreciated and respected; a philosophy that they can subscribe to; and a chance to grow in their professional and personal lives.

Is your organization satisfying these basic workforce needs? Are you giving your talent opportunities to do meaningful and purposeful work while giving them opportunities to continue to learn and grow? Are their concerns addressed and their opinions taken into consideration as your organization makes decisions that will impact them? Do they feel truly appreciated and adequately rewarded for their hard work and commitment? If your workforce feels that their commitment is unrequited, it will grow disillusioned and perhaps decide to look elsewhere for the acknowledgement that it deserves.

Does your organization’s culture encourage open dialogue and honesty? Do your employees withhold their honest observations and suggestions for fear of politics or reprisal? If so, not only is your organization missing out on a valuable resource for growth and improvement but you are creating a climate of discomfort and uneasiness that ushers viable talent out of your door and into the fold of your competitors.

While your executive team may feel that your organization is already “a good company to work for” your workforce may not agree. How can a forward thinking company get a grip on the true pulse of its organization?

POLL THE TALENT THAT YOU HAVE TO GET THE TALENT THAT YOU WANT

Organizations that truly care about the opinions of its populace employ methods such as anonymous employee surveys, suggestion boxes, focus groups, company assemblies and one-on-ones. This will enable you to take the pulse of your organization's health; one of two factors Patrick Lencioni, author of the bestseller, *Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive*, considers essential to your company's success. Eliminating the politics and confusion that often result in low employee morale, costly turnover and stunted productivity will stimulate your organizational health and help you retain your current workforce and attract new talent. Polling your current talent will help you to honestly assess where your organization needs to make improvements. Such preventive measures can effectively thwart future problems and make your organization attractive to future talent.

An honest self-examination is indispensable in the quest for viable talent. Asking the hard questions will get you the answers that you need, though not necessarily the ones that you want. Do



not be discouraged if the responses are not what you want to hear, and never arbitrarily dismiss them. Rather, make effective use of that information for the continued development of your organization. Remember that the purpose of this effort is to improve your organization and make it attractive to prospective talent in order to successfully meet your goals. Achieving the desired results will make this process worthwhile.

The following list of questions is designed as a foundation from which to build a plan of action that will be specific to the needs of your organization. They are:

1. Do we regularly communicate our goals, mission and values to our employees?
2. Do our current employees identify with this mission?
3. Do our employees enjoy coming to work everyday?
4. Do we show real appreciation for our employees?
5. Do our employees feel as though they are truly heard and that their opinions matter?
6. Are we open to feedback regarding our management style?
7. Is our culture one of openness and communication or fear and repression?
8. Do employees truly feel comfortable sharing their concerns?
9. Do we give our employees opportunities to learn and grow?
10. Does our company culture inspire our employees?
11. Do we value our employees' input on matters that impact their current and future duties?
12. Do we offer employees flexibility that acknowledges their "real life" outside of work?

BUILD A CULTURE THAT RETAINS ITS TALENT

Polling your current workforce will give you the raw materials needed to affect positive change in your organization. What things is your organization doing right? Where did your workforce identify opportunities for improvement? Use the information gleaned to your organization's advantage by strengthening the positive aspects of your organization while working to correct inequities.

Your response to what has been shared will have a major impact upon your organization and its morale. Consider how the following factors can have a positive effect upon your ability to attract and retain top talent:

Fairness can seem very subjective; however, if your organization clearly has a culture that is very political in nature, it is easy to see why employees who consider themselves "outsiders" will be dissatisfied. How can your organization avoid the perception of unfairness or elitism? Developing clear and concise guidelines that determine behaviors that work in harmony with the company's goals; a well-defined performance management process; consistent criteria used to compensate, reward and promote employees and concrete disciplinary guidelines that are consistently followed will sharply decrease such feelings. The benefits of adopting and implementing such methods? Your organization will experience an increase in morale, higher productivity and better customer service because your employees are most likely to treat your customers in the same manner you treat them.

Learning opportunities offered to your employees can provide an incredible return on investment. Technical training is essential in today's marketplace where skills quickly grow obsolete with the constant improvement of technology. Teambuilding, leadership and other training will strengthen your organization and enable your employees to work cohesively. The impact on your organizational health and productivity can be immense. Additionally, employees who receive training tend to be happier, excel within your organization and remain with your company.



Flexibility allows your workforce to give 100% on the job without sacrificing their families, personal interests or health. An organization that fairly and consistently offers employees the opportunity to balance their professional and personal lives endears itself to both current and potential talent and will engender loyalty in its workforce. Companies that offer employees flexibility in their schedule and benefits are often rated among "the best places to work."

Wages & Benefits quite often make it to the top of the list of employee recommendations. While most companies will quickly dismiss this suggestion, fearing that their budget cannot bear it; it is important to consider whether your organization is paying at or above market value. Fair compensation and generous benefits are one important factor in your battle to attract and retain your talent. However, much more is needed to keep your workforce engaged in your organization.

THE ROLE OF LEADERSHIP IN EMPLOYEE RETENTION

What type of feedback did you receive regarding your organization's leadership? Does your workforce respect and admire your leadership; or do they feel disconnected and unappreciated? It is important to consider the role that leaders play in the attraction and retention of top talent. Many organizations fail miserably in this area; costly turnover, low productivity and stagnant growth are direct results of poor leadership.

An organization may lament its inability to attract and retain good employees; yet it lacks the courage to address the poor leadership skills that are contributing to this serious problem. *The O&P Principle*, authored by Roger Connors, Tom Smith, and Craig Hickman encourages accountability on the part of both the individual and the organization. Companies will rise "above the line" when they summon the courage to "See it. Own it. Solve it. Do it." Does your organization demonstrate this level of accountability?

Remember, the impact that direct managers and supervisors have upon your staff is tremendous. In a culture where loyalty to employer has been completely redefined, companies must earn the allegiance of their workforce. How is your leadership faring in this area? Consider some methods of effective leaders:



- **Open dialogue.** Spend time talking with your staff. Listen to their concerns and respond promptly. Build trust by honestly communicating issues that will impact them.
- **Do not micromanage:** Hire the right employees then allow them to do their jobs. Encourage accountability in your organization that will help you rise "above the line."
- **Involve employees in decisions** that will affect them.
- **Stand behind your staff;** never hang them out to dry in order to make yourself look better. They will appreciate your support and respect your ability to acknowledge when you are wrong.
- **Build your team** by recognizing and rewarding employees for their hard work and efforts. Encourage social outings and other team building exercises.
- **Coach your employees.** Help them to develop a concrete plan for advancement. Make continuous training available to your employees.

Employee surveys and focus groups can help your organization gain valuable insight on how it can improve its standing as an "employer of choice." Tools such as 360° Feedback will help your leadership to improve their methods and effectiveness and leadership training provides an excellent return on investment, impacting employee retention, organizational health and productivity.

Employees who are committed to your company's vision, feel valued, and are involved in the process which governs them experience a much higher rate of satisfaction and retention. Retaining your experienced, committed talent will enable your organization to achieve its goals more efficiently.

ATTRACTING AND RETAINING TALENT REQUIRES COMMITMENT

"Good ideas are common - what's uncommon are people who'll work hard enough to bring them about"

Ashleigh Brilliant

Just as companies periodically assess their employees' performance; today's professionals are making a careful evaluation of their companies and deciding whether the pastures are greener elsewhere. Periods of personnel transition are costly, taxing on your remaining employees and often represent lost opportunities during the period of absence and learning curve of the replacement employee. This turnover also represents a serious loss of investment.

Does your organization possess the commitment needed to become a talent magnet? A sustained effort is required to both attract and retain talent. The results, however, is a workforce that is loyal and committed to your vision and goals.

Clearly communicating your company's vision and mission to your workforce will enable employees to align themselves with the vision. Give your workforce the necessary tools to succeed by making opportunities available to participate in continuous training programs.

As new talent is sought, expend your efforts on seeking those who clearly identify with your mission. Determine exactly what your organization needs in terms of both hard skill sets, and people skills before you begin your search. This will increase your success in finding the "right" candidate. Honestly communicate your organization's expectations to potential talent. Though this may reduce the number of applicants, the ones that are left will likely be much better suited for your organization.

Continuously reevaluate your company culture and management practices. Don't be afraid to make changes for the benefit of the organization. Do not tolerate ineffective leadership; keep in mind the impact that your management has upon your workforce's perception of your organization. Poor leadership skills deteriorate your morale and productivity and result in costly turnover that is devastating to your bottom line.

Leadership training and teambuilding will have a measurable effect upon your organization. It is an investment in your organization's future that will promote your organizational health and motivate both current and aspiring managers within your organization.

Effective leadership programs teach or enhance critical management skills and establish a methodology for productive interactions between team members and team leaders. A foundation can be built that will enable your organization's current and future leadership to manage your organization toward its vision. Therefore, in today's competitive talent market, prudent investment in comprehensive leadership training programs is a wise investment for any organization in quest of attracting and retaining the cream of the talent crop. Will your organization take the necessary steps to attract and retain top talent?

About the Author



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Tim Wilson is a business management and organizational development consultant with more than 30 years of progressive business and managerial experience in senior-level positions. He has extensive knowledge of the technology industry derived from 25 years with Digital Equipment Corporation, once one of the largest high technology employers in New England.

Tim's most valuable strengths are in team building, training, change management, developing organizations, and understanding businesses' need to persistently focus on their bottom line. He is an expert in the areas of accountability, revenue generation and diversity management and inclusion, helping businesses to improve communication, enhance employee performance, increase productivity, and quantify their investment in diversity.

Professional Development and Education

Tim started his career in information systems, but quickly moved to human resources to apply his experience resolving system and people issues, and to acquire expertise in organizational development and employee/human relations. He held positions in the retail, insurance, financial services and management consulting industries before settling into the tech arena in 1974.

Tim possesses a Master of Science degree in applied management from Lesley College in Cambridge, MA and a Bachelor of Science in business administration and information systems from Clark University in Worcester, MA. He also received an Associates degree in business management from Fisher College in Boston.

T.A. Wilson and Associates creates customized, focused programs and conducts specialized training designed for your entire organization or individual one-on-one sessions. We provide proven solutions based on decades of knowledge and experience in organizational management and development solutions focused on your company's goals.

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