

CSI: Solving The Employee Retention Mystery

By Deanne DeMarco

The Crime Scene Investigator (CSI) shows on television have become very popular as they uncover the mystery around a homicide. The scientists look for clues and follow the evidence in uncovering the mystery surrounding how and who caused the untimely death of a victim. In the business world, savvy executives realize that employee retention is critical to the long-term health and life of their organizations. Without an adequate number of employees to do the work, organizations could become the victims of an untimely “death.” Successful organizations know that becoming an “Employer of Choice” enables them to retain high caliber employees, and this is a key to bottom line success.

As the baby boomers (age 40-60) retire, senior executives and managers are starting to realize retention of high caliber employees is becoming a problem in their organizations. The facts tell it all: the Generation X population numbers 44 million people, while the Baby Boomer generation workforce numbered 76 million. The bottom line is simple - there are fewer workers available.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, by 2010 there could be a shortage in the workforce of nearly ten million workers. Employee retention matters! Some economists have stated that perhaps as early as this year companies will begin to feel the pressure of retaining top talent.

Generation X: New Generation of Workers, New Mindset

In the late 1990's, Generation Xers observed the long hours and work-life of their parents and older co-workers. They are saying that the workaholic lifestyle of their parents isn't for them. According to a January 2006 article in Fortune Magazine, “ If your [workforce] was born between 1964 and 1977, you probably already know all too well that Generation X, as it's often called, just doesn't respond to the same carrots and sticks that motivates its elders.”

Survey results conducted by the Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM) serve as a timely warning to organizations. According to the survey, HR professionals believe that voluntary turnover will increase 41% to 53% among the Gen X work group. The report also revealed that 64% of employees in this work group said they were extremely likely to increase the intensity of their job search activities in the near future.

Here are three retention strategies that you can take to help keep your key employees.

C stands for Communication: Employees want to be in the know.

When you fail to communicate, you fail the employee and the organization. Employees want strong communication activities, which include feedback, group communication, and corporate communication.

Feedback is communication that is given to an employee or team. Positive feedback often involves telling an employee about good performance. Negative, or what is sometimes referred to as constructive feedback, often involves telling someone about an area in performance that can be improved.

- Employee surveys continually report the need for one-on-one feedback that is both timely and actionable. Feedback, either positive or negative, needs to be given immediately after the occurrence. All too often an employee receives feedback months after an action occurred, and the facts surrounding the action are obscure. Employees also complain that managers are lax in giving positive feedback - employees need to know what they are doing well.
- Actionable. Successful feedback includes information or action items that an employee has control over and can do something about. Effective feedback is specific, and is focused on specific behaviors or actions that the employee can control.
- The Gen Xers are reporting the need for more group communication. This includes group problem solving and strategic planning. This generation prefers working in teams and likes group involvement and being informed.
- Employee surveys also report the need for meaningful communication around company issues. Employees want to know about organizational goals, and how their job is relevant to those goals and bottom line success. A very retention-focused company is successfully using employee think tanks to brainstorm ideas around corporate issues.

S stands for Supervision: Managers build teams, manage performance, and develop individuals to help them achieve success on the job. Employees don't leave good companies – they leave bad bosses.

The role of manager is changing and is becoming more important than ever. Progressive companies are teaching their managers how to coach employees. The role as manager-coach requires a different skill set than the previous managerial role. Coaching employees is a results-oriented process of open communication and feedback between manager and employee. The manager-coach acts as a strategic partner in facilitating the employee's development process. In sports, the coach prepares the team, gives direction and helps troubleshoot problems. It is then up to the team to produce positive results on the field. The same is true with coaching a work team. The manager-coach prepares the team while the employees perform the work. One free source on coaching is from *Pocket Resource*. This introductory, quick tip e-book was written for managers who want quick tools and tips on coaching. Go to www.pocketresource.com to download the information. The e-book should not be confused with an in-depth business coaching program for managers.

Lastly, employees want visible managers who are out on the floor, developing rapport and working with them. They want managers who vocally appreciate the work and effort they contribute. Successful managers realize they can't do the work without the employees, and provide positive feedback on a regular basis.

One sign of exceptional leadership is the ability to retain key employees. Managers with high turnover rates are seriously damaging their companies. If the company is going to succeed it must retain its talent. The heart beat of organizational success hinges on the retention of qualified employees. Organizations today can't afford to lose good, qualified workers to competitors.

I stands for Interest: Employees want to know they are valued and important.

Employee attitudes have changed. Gen Xers are concerned about their personal quality of life. This can be a challenge for employers. One growing problem is the inability for corporate cultures to support the work/life balance initiatives they've put into place. There have been several documented cases when a company has a corporate work/life policy that states a benefit, however when the employee tries to exercise the benefit, he or she is denied. For example, in one company there is a policy that allows a worker to elect a status change from full-time employment to part-time employment. However when a Gen X mother requested the change in her status from full-time to part-time, so she could be at home more with her young children, she was denied. When she reminded her manager and department director of the published benefit, she was denied again and told to seek employment elsewhere.

Solutions come in different shapes and sizes. Some work/life benefits include:

- * Flex-time
- * Vacation
- * Work hours
- * Childcare
- * Eldercare
- * Telecommuting
- * Job-sharing
- * Leave (paternity/maternity)
- * In-house store/ services
- * Company gyms or gym subsidies
- * Celebrations
- * Four day work weeks

The bottom line

Organizations that are adapting to the new work/life balance mindset are experiencing employees who are more loyal and committed to the companies they represent.

Organizations that fail to focus on these issues will soon lose their key employees.

For some companies retention is a mystery. However, everyday we hear of another company that has unlocked the key to retention. The workforce may change, but successful corporations still need the same results: productivity, profitability, and a loyal workforce committed to the company's bottom line.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Deanne DeMarco, MA, RCC, works with organizations that want to train their managers to be more effective in motivating and retaining their new workforce. She is a Nobel

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