One does not have to be in business for long to discover how expensive it is to train employees. Often, the same discouraging scenario occurs: We teach recruits about our company, spend time and money training them to be employees, then they quit after a short time and with them go their new skills, your investment and they end up working for the competitor. The equally dismal alternative is not to train them, never let them achieve proficiency and hope they stay.

What is the answer to the challenge of recruiting and retaining good people? It is possible to have new employees sign a contract that says they cannot join another similar firm for a period of time after leaving your business, but a no-competition clause is often hard to enforce and expensive to pursue. The answer is acquiring the right person for the right job and meeting their personal job goals.

Research on labor has repeatedly confirmed that people rarely leave jobs, they leave managers. Salaries and benefits are not the real problem, although they are often the reason given for leaving. There are two main reasons for leaving a company. First, the managers may not be good mentors. We overlook the responsibility for leadership in good managers. Managers are saddled with company operations to see that jobs are done, standards are met and a profit is generated. Managers are trained to be task-oriented. Their main focus is their own performance through the success of their workers. They are not focused on mentoring, providing opportunities for learning, or meeting goals that are not their own or the company’s. There may be conflict in personalities and the way information is communicated. They may not be equipped to bring out the best in others or empower employees when appropriate. The dissatisfaction of working with someone who has little regard for the goals of others does not make for a rewarding job.

The second issue is the job itself. Many people are hired by a firm to do specific tasks, but they are not really where they would choose to be. The company structure may not allow for internal movement or a measurement to determine where the employee would fit the best. An employee may recognize a different area of the business that they are better suited for, but for job security or the risk of stepping out of the bounds of hierarchy, they stay at their current post and don’t communicate their preferences. Consequently, he or she is unhappy on the job.

The key to retaining good employees is to put them in a pleasant, enjoyable and desired environment. A rewarding, non-threatening workplace will allow the individual to develop who they are as an employee. Understanding the company and expectations should be part of the initial training.

Most employees at least start out wanting to do a good job. A position that provides opportunities to learn, advance and be included in the strategies for success will develop employee motivation. Often, people go back into the workforce after retirement because they miss being a part of something great. Involve your employees in the big picture, show them the goals and achievements that they are or have been part of, show appreciation whenever possible, and celebrate successes. Most employees will respond with unwavering loyalty and a willingness to do their best.

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