

Corp! Magazine Publisher Gathers, Shares Tips For Retaining Talent

By: William E. Pilchak

Nearly everyone knows that there is a shortage of skills in many job classifications today, so that recruiting becomes more and more difficult. The flip-side of that coin is the importance in retaining your best employees. Heaven forbid that your best talent is walking out the back door while you are recruiting neophytes to come in the front door.

Jennifer Kluge of Corp! Magazine and Maura Kizer, a local Snelling Staffing franchise owner, spoke at the Auburn Hills Chamber of Commerce's Talent Town Hall recently. Kluge made a point that I have heard elsewhere, that only 30% of employees are "engaged" at work, while 30% are actively disengaged, i.e., acting *against* the company's interests. Kizer believes that 44% are passively looking for employment elsewhere.

Finding those engaged employees is key. Radio Flyer uses a 10-step on-boarding process that assures only the most committed candidates are offered jobs. Among the steps are 1) completing a written assignment, which not only shows writing skills but whether a candidate is willing to do "more than necessary" to get the job; 2) requiring the candidate to prepare 15 questions about Radio Flyer; and 3) one interview focused exclusively on the person's values, rather than skills, experience, etc.

Keeping the engaged employees is the next goal. Both Kluge and Kizer have made it a point of collecting strategies used by companies to retain and grow the percentage of engaged employees. Here are some of them. Not all will work everywhere.

- 100% flex-time schedules;
- Friday morning bagels with C-suite executives;
- New parent re-entry programs, to ease the transition back to work;
- Weekly recognition of employee accomplishments. Corp! holds a "marble ceremony" whenever an employee deserves kudos, where a colored marble is dropped into a clear glass vase throughout the year. Not only does the vase illustrate all the accomplishments, but when it reaches the top, the company funds an outing.
- Forming groups for women, minorities, parents, and even pet-owners that meet during lunch;
- Employee Appreciation Day where the bosses do the barbequing.
- "Pink" casual days with donations to breast cancer research.
- Bringing in an on-site job coach to work with employees on their career paths.
- Similarly, bringing in an on-site financial planner to conduct lunch-time seminars;
- A Question of the Month posted in the lobby on non-work topics (i.e., favorite holiday celebrations) where answers are collected and disseminated electronically.
- Forming a "Business Involvement Committee" including employees nominated from all levels who serve 1-year terms and meet with top executives to hear about (and disseminate to coworkers) the business conditions that drive their work conditions while bubbling up ideas and opinions to management.
- Of course, the traditional reward for valuable ideas shouldn't be forgotten.

- A surprise “outing” on a normally scheduled work day, where the employees arrive in casual clothes, the company suspends operations and all are bussed to an enjoyable surprise venue, such as a Tigers game.
- Cultural alignment programs made fun, such as an “Eye of the Tiger” campaign with theme music and balloons.
- One employer conducts an on-site university. Have you noticed how competitive universities and colleges have become? They will hold classes among your employees at your facility if there are enough to fill classes.
- Another employer has an on-site comedian!
- An obviously larger company provides a 25 day furlough and \$25,000 after 20 years of service.

If the right employee-retention idea is not listed above, we hope this list gives you some ideas. Incidentally, if the “financial advisor” idea strikes a chord, P&C have a contact that specializes in that precise niche.

