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Employee Engagement

Fostering Employee Engagement with New Employees

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Keeping employees productive, interested, and invested in their jobs are examples of “employee engagement.” The topic of employee engagement is gaining momentum in business circles as unemployment rates begin to decline, available applicant pools start shrinking, and good employees become harder to find or replace. It is estimated that as few as 1 in 3 employees in today’s workforce describe themselves as “engaged.” Employee engagement, or the lack of it, is often cited as a major reason people leave jobs. In this article, we will explore some ways to encourage employee engagement in the hiring and “onboarding” process. A subsequent article will focus on ways to keep longer term employees engaged and invested in the workplace.

Let’s see if this scenario sounds familiar:

You are trying to fill a position on your staff. You go through a four to six week process (if you’re lucky) to interview and hire a desperately needed employee. You invest another one to three months in training the employee and getting them up to speed. Approximately six months after starting, the employee quits due to a “different opportunity.” You are now in the busiest part of your season, one employee short, and are looking at starting the entire frustrating process all over again.

Unfortunately employee turnover is not only time consuming, but costly as well. The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) estimates that a single \$8.00 per hour employee can cost around \$3,500 to replace, which includes recruiting, interviewing, hiring, training, loss of productivity, etc. Other labor industry and business groups suggest employee turnover could be as much as 30-50% of an entry-level employee’s annual salary. So not only does it make sense to find and retain the best employees for productivity purposes, but to avoid the high cost of replacing them as well.

Here are some suggestions managers may incorporate into their hiring/onboarding practices to foster employee engagement and a longer term employment relationship:

1. Honesty in Interviewing

Often when managers are desperate to fill a position quickly or they believe they have a promising candidate they don’t want to lose, they may be more apt to sugar coat a job or environment to get an employee signed-on/in the door. This can lead to a “short-term” victory, but perhaps long-term “losing of the war.” The reality is about 35% of American workers quit in the first 6 months. More than 6 in 10 turnovers are attributed to some kind of post-hire shock - the employee realizes that the job or workplace wasn’t what they expected. It is important for a manager to fully disclose the responsibilities of the job - good AND bad - to the applicant. Conditions such as exposure to the elements (heat, cold, rain, etc.), labor intensive requirements, and long work hours in peak periods are all truths of the industry that should be displayed honestly and upfront.

2. Seeing is Believing

If you are talking with applicants who have little experience or understanding as to the duties and responsibilities of your industry, describing the needs of a position, including the ergonomic and physical demands, can be pretty difficult. But if you have an opportunity to *show* the applicants first hand some of the more labor intensive duties, the applicant can make a better decision as to whether this is something they are interested in doing on a long-term basis.

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Understandably this can be time consuming or perhaps not realistic due to seasonal responsibilities, so why not utilize technology? Recording employees doing different, labor intensive or intricate functions (*correctly!!!*) so applicants can see exactly what the job entails gives a “real-world” viewpoint as to what is expected. If done correctly, these videos can also be utilized in training employee’s proper techniques later on in the onboarding process.

The items on this list each take a bit of time - something of which managers are in short supply. But perhaps by investing a little extra time to help employees feel engaged, invested, and successful from the start, it will save the time (and money!) of having to replace employees just a few months later.

3. Introductions are In Order

The integration of a new employee into the workplace can induce all the same stress, uncertainty, and insecurities one associates with the “new kid” starting at a brand new school. Taking the time to introduce the new employee to their team is important, but make sure they are shadowing your best/most productive employees in each skill set they need to perform in the job. Utilizing a “mentor” system where the employee is teamed with someone who they feel free to ask questions and feel comfortable will also go a long way in getting them up to speed quicker, more fully acclimated to the environment, and better integrated into the team from the start.

4. Set New Employees up to Succeed

Hiring an employee is just the beginning. Sadly, managers often have so much on their plates that they start looking to the next fire burning now that the new employee is hired, and just leave it to fate that they will work out. The reality is if we aren’t setting employees up to succeed, we are probably setting them up to fail. Make the employee’s success a priority. It is important for managers to not only take the time and effort to clearly explain what is expected of the employee, but provide them with a written plan as well. Arming employees with a strategy, clear expectations, and a definition of what is considered “successful” in their positions helps to clear up any confusion and makes the employee better informed. Conducting follow-up discussions or “check-ups” at regularly scheduled intervals throughout the employee’s probationary period is also a great way to see how the employee is personally feeling in their new job, clear up any questions/concerns, and further define the manager’s expectations so the employee knows they are on track.