



Hiring and Retaining Good Employees

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Overview

Hiring good employees is not only important to projects, it's essential. Employees are the heart and soul of a project; they are the mechanism that makes a project run; they are the breath of life that enables a project to translate an idea into reality. A project cannot run unless someone (employees, in this case) is doing the work. Any intelligent project manager should want good employees.

Employers not the only ones to feel the Effect

Just as a Business, a project has customers. In Business, bad employees not only affect an employer by driving down sales, costing the company unwanted expenses due to negligence or simple lack of motivation, etc, but they affect the customer as well. Of course, once a customer has experienced a bad employee, it automatically affects the employer in obvious ways. It is the same with projects.

Although this seems like common sense to most people, it is uncanny how most employers will overlook this fact, whether it's because of time constraints to effectively deal with the problem or lack of better judgment. Whatever the case, it is a fact that sales get driven down and production slowed for a reason. That reason could very well be because of the customer's lack of satisfaction with whatever service he or she had received and that lack of satisfaction stems from bad employees.

Find the right people to start with

This is one of the most important things you, as an employer, can do. Getting the right people into your company to start with gets things moving in the right direction at the very beginning.

According to Chairman and CEO, Hal F. Rosenbluth, and Consultant, Diane McFerrin Peters, of Rosenbluth International, the third-largest travel management company in the world

“Most of us choose our spouse with care and rear our children with nurturing and compassionate attention. Yet, we tend to select the people who will join our company on the basis of an interview or two, and once they have joined, they often find that they must fend for themselves.

This contrast illustrates the disparity between the environments of family and work. But, given the amount of time we must spend at work, wouldn't we all be happier if we took as much care at the office as at home to create a supportive environment? Wouldn't we also be far more successful?”

The answer is “Yes”.

The Customer does not come First

It's important to remember that if you want quality employees, your company must be of the same caliber. If you expect to attract an employee who thrives to be as dedicated to the project as possible, doing more than what is expected, and putting forth 110% without any consideration being given to the employee's personal needs, thoughts, and desires, you are truly fooling yourself. And, eventually, your project will suffer for it.

It's obvious to most, by now, that benefits and perks play a large part in attracting employees. I need not explain the many benefits that a company should make available to attract a good employee because it should be common sense to most, by now. I will say, however, that attaining a good employee must go much farther than just having a great set of benefits. After all, does a wonderful benefits package actually attract only good employees? Of course not. There must be more to it than that.

For the customer to be served with the best results humanly possible, a more modern approach to the theory of customer satisfaction must be realized which is that the customer should not come first; the employee should. Therein in itself is one of the most successful ways to attract a good employee.

When a business puts its employees first, many things can happen. To begin with, the employee is happy. If the employee is happy, the service that the employee provides to the customer will be far more outstanding than if he or she were not happy. If the service is outstanding, the customer will be happy and that only spells successful results for the business or project.

This does not mean that an employer must wait hand and foot on the employee. No, it simply means that careful consideration to what an employee thinks, wants, and suggests should be considered. Do not treat an employee as if he or she is a factory robot working on a clock. Treat them as people. Treat them with respect by talking to them as people and not "talking down to them" as "employees". In fact, a good idea would be to remove the term "employee" all together. One successful company I know of refers to its employees as "associates", thereby empowering their "associates" with a feeling of more respect and purpose.

Employee Leadership and Flexibility a must

An open, friendly atmosphere is a must in a workplace. Micro managing projects, as most already are aware of, is frowned upon. This is for a reason. When a work environment is open enough for all employees to contribute and offer ideas and suggestions, without ridicule or negative response, this sparks creativity in an employee and, again, empowers them to contribute more to the project. If everyone feels as though they are a part of the leadership process and not just a worker bee, they will have a satisfying feeling that can go a long way. Micro managing completely kills this system.

An employer must be flexible. Does there really need to be a rigid schedule? Does lunchtime really need to take place at a specific time? Who actually needs a clock to tell them when they are hungry? This line of thinking is what is needed in every faucet of business, as simple as it seems. It makes an employee feel more like a human; it makes them feel as though the business respects them as a person and will put them first. Once that consideration is instilled in an employee's mind, there isn't

anything that he or she wouldn't do for a project. And, when a person looks forward to waking up in the morning to begin working in a place where they feel management gives them respect and thinks highly of them, they will put forth the effort to show appreciation.

Hire Nice People

Experience and degrees are great ways of measuring employees' qualifications and potential...but ask yourself, are they nice people? A person can be the most qualified, educated, and experienced possible employee on the planet but if they have the personality of a wet paper bag or of a caged wolverine, it's guaranteed they're not going to do much for your project. Those that have to work with them will be disgruntled on a daily bases and begin putting out a poor performance. The customers that receive service from them will be unhappy and I need not say what happens after that.

Hire nice people. Nice people can do wonders for a project. Sound picky? It is. But, when it comes to your project, can you afford not to be picky?

A nice person can learn anything. Nice people are pleasant to be around and are easy to teach. They are notoriously quick to learn. So, even if your nice person does not have the skill set that you are looking for, one might consider the possibility of training. Think about the potential, especially if nice people seem to be rare in your neck of the woods.

How do you find Nice People

This should be obvious. During the interview process, were they down-to-earth or were they focused solely on success, success, and more success? As crazy as it may seem, the total, success driven fanatic may not be the best option. Again, the person who seems more like a "person" would be the best candidate for hiring. In the long run, they will make your project more successful because they would make the customer, as well as those that have to work with them, happier.

Conduct tests and unconventional interview methods. Why should an interview consist of one or two meetings in a stuffy room? How can we really find out about a person that way? The answer is that we can't. Instead, how about combining the stuffy office interview one day with another day of playing a game of softball with other, current employees, as Hal F. Rosenbluth and Diane McFerrin tend to do within their company? This would be great for company moral and, at the same time, provide a chance to see how the potential employee reacts in a team environment. If the person is bent on nothing but winning and becomes angry when other teammates drop the ball or do not hit as far as they should, perhaps this person is not the best employee to have around. Chances are that their performance on the softball field will reflect their performance in the office.

Go for a drive. As again explained by Hal F. Rosenbluth and Diane McFerrin Peters, the way a person drives an automobile says a lot about a person's personality. Are they overly aggressive and speed through traffic, weaving in and out of other cars, determined to get to the point of destination no matter what the cost? Or, are they assertive drivers who consider the safety of their passengers and think of alternate routes when confronted with a traffic jam, focusing more on the drive than the destination? Which person would you rather have working for you? Which person

would you rather have serving your customers? If you were a customer, which person would you rather have serving you?

Invite your new, potential employee to a company social event. Are they the type of person that talks only of themselves and continuously brags about all of the wonderful things that he or she has done? Do they even talk to anyone at all? These are the folks that either want to gain far more than they are willing to contribute or aren't willing to gain or contribute. These are the type of people that will bring your company down.

So, some key points to consider thus far:

- Consider your employees before your customers. Not only will the employee put out a far better performance due to feeling respected, but your project will also build a reputation as being “the project to work for”, which will attract other, good employees.
- Be flexible. Constraints in the office constrain creativity and work performance. Go for casual clothing, if possible. Let your employee decide when it's time to eat and take a break. Be flexible on your employee's schedule, catering to his or her personal needs. The employee will show appreciation in return, by supplying a good output of production.
- Hire nice people. Not one customer in the world, no matter what business you are in, enjoys service from someone with less-than-appreciative attitude. And, your other employees will not enjoy working with them either, bringing down moral and production drastically. This kind of person will not be willing to strive at contributing to your project; they will strive to contribute only to themselves.
- Consider the unconventional when interviewing an employee. The more often you can set a scenario that a potential employee will not expect or could find to be an unusual method of interviewing, the better. It will give you a chance to see what that person is really capable of, as a person.

Retaining Good Employees

As important as attracting good employees is, it is just as important to retain them. As always, benefit packages help to retain employees. But, again, this is something that most people are already aware of. Sure, there will be those that will want to stay for the great benefits. But, is that all you, as an employer, can offer? No.

After spending as much time as you should have in attracting good employees, it only makes sense that you would go to certain lengths to keep them. Chances are, if you really attracted a good employee, it wasn't just because of the benefits. And, chances are that your good employee will not stay just because of the benefits. Benefits, although a positive force, are not the end all and can, at times, be a false sense of security to a project manager. Not everyone develops his or her retention decision on a benefits package, at least not the smart employee.

Let them change it up now and again

Let your people explore your company. Don't lock them into one, specific type of work, especially if they express desire to try other things. In today's job market, job-hopping, as it is known, is a regular occurrence. If you provide your employees with the chance to job-hop “within” your company, this is one way of keeping them there.

Give them the opportunity to gain new experience, knowledge, and skills across a variety of projects. This will only enhance your company anyway, by having an employee that can do and handle more. It also increases confidence in the employee and makes their work more satisfying. The United States military and civil services such as police and fire departments have already figured that one out. They call it cross-training and fleeting-up and it's a great idea.

Communication

Communicating is very important, not only in day to day project management, but in retention as well. People need to feel as though they have a grasp on what is going on within the company. They want to know where the company is going and how they will be part of that process. They need to feel they are involved in the company as well as the project. Being part of any planning processes, being able to contribute ideas for the company, and essentially being heard is all part of communication. Again, this is emphasized in most of the U.S.'s military forces as well, even though they conduct themselves in more of a dictatorship.

Know why your people wanted to join your company in the first place and hone in on that. Keep that priority of the employee in consideration, always acting on it and developing it, and the employee will want to continue that purpose with a strong sense.

Talk to your people. Not only should you get to know them, you should get to know what they continue to want and think. And, don't think for a minute that a person's desires and thoughts on particular matters will be the same later down the road as they were when they first joined the organization. Things change, including your employee's thoughts and desires. Keep up with those changes.

Get feedback from your employee's. Find out what they think is right and wrong with the company. Provide a feedback forum. And, most importantly, act on the information you receive from this feedback.

In summary:

- Let your employee job hop and provide an opportunity to let them do it within your company, instead of having to go outside the company. More than likely, if they can't do it in the company, they will venture outside to a place that they can. Take advantage of the multiple skills your people can learn within projects. This not only helps your company out, it gives the employee a feeling of more purpose and he or she will enjoy not having to go far to expand their skills.
- Keep your project people in mind when it comes to information on where the company is headed and what it is doing. If the employee does not feel informed on what is happening, they will not feel as though they are part of the company and, therefore, will not want to stay, in the long run.
- Get to know what your people want, when they first enter the organization and periodically throughout their tenure. People's motives and desires change. The good employer is the one that can keep up with those changes. Offer feedback methods and make sure you act on the results.
- Above all, remember what it was that got you that good employee in the first place. The concepts mentioned in this article that enable an employer to attain

a good employee to begin with are basically the same principals of retaining them as well. It's that simple. Anyone who works for a company that considers their needs, is just, and can remain flexible, as well as provides other good employees to work alongside, will want to continue working in that company. Hiring and retaining good employees goes hand in hand.

About The Author:

Myron Curry is President and CEO of [BusinessTrainingMedia.com](http://www.businesstrainingmedia.com) a leading provider of workforce and business development training programs designed exclusively for corporate deployment. Myron has over 20 years of successful management experience with leading fortune 500 companies and has written numerous articles about workforce management issues. You can contact Myron at: myron@business-marketing.com or visit his company's website <http://www.businesstrainingmedia.com>

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