

Developing Talented Employees

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It's great to identify your most valuable players, but how do you keep them motivated and committed to your team? Even if talented employees love their jobs, it pays for managers to invest in their long-term success. Here's a game plan for building loyalty and retaining talent.

Provide Challenges and Feedback

Sharon Jordan-Evans of Jordan Evans Group and coauthor of Love 'Em or Lose 'Em: Getting Good People to Stay suggests giving talented employees assignments that provide opportunities to grow. Support their efforts, and give specific feedback. For example, you could say: "Your last speech was about a seven on a 10-point scale. Here's what would make it a 10."

Measure Progress

Work with each employee to determine specific goals to be accomplished within a given time frame, says Carol E. Gilson, vice president of human resources and client services for EMPO, a professional employers organization. Consider

measuring:

- Sales and production numbers
- Level of cooperation & teamwork
- Customer satisfaction.

Brian Margarita, CEO of IT staffing firm TalentFuse, says such quantitative measures are helpful, but qualitative assessments of softer skills often result in the most dramatic personal growth. For instance, is the employee punctual with meetings? Is he generally enthused? Is he willing to share knowledge with other employees?

Reward Success

Your stars – the ones likely to be working the hardest – may need help decompressing. Managers can help by injecting some fun into the work process, says George Mantor, founder, president and CEO of The Associates Financial Group. Frequent gatherings with food are always welcome.

"You don't need a special event and regular weekly meetings that bring everyone together," Mantor says. "But as part of the routine, assure that plenty of socializing opportunity exists. The intensity that

can often accompany high levels of achievement needs a release. Plan fun into the work environment wherever possible."

Tell Them They Matter

Simply telling people how much you value them can be key to winning their loyalty.

"Managers and organizations miss the mark when they neglect to tell their talented people how much they value their contributions and what they mean to the team and organization," Jordan-Evans says. "Try this: 'You matter greatly to me and to this team. I may not have told you often enough, but it's true. I can't imagine losing you. I want you to stay -- and to grow with this company. What do you want to learn this year? I'm committed to helping you learn and grow here.' People who've had bosses say this to them -- unfortunately a small proportion of [the] employee population -- report feeling valued and appreciated. Their levels of commitment and loyalty soared."

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