

Boosting Employee Satisfaction And Retention

| All it takes is a plan

By **Evan Hackel**

What makes employees love working for your company? What makes them want to stay?

There are many answers to those questions. Some people stay because they like the content of the jobs they perform. Others like their bosses. Still others like your benefits, the emphasis you place on work/life balance or the fact that you give back to your community and stand for something.

But I would like to offer my observation that many people fall in love with their jobs because of something else . . .

They know they have a future with your company

That is another way of saying that they can realistically look forward to moving up and to taking on new challenges and responsibilities. They are “going somewhere,” and that speaks to many employees. That observation might not apply to certain classes of workers who want to continue doing just what they are doing currently, like temporary summer workers or



employees who really are happy to come in to staff cash registers for a few hours a day, and then head home.

But in general, employees who are hoping for long-term employment with your organization like to know that they are going somewhere. And how do you let them know they have a future with you? One of the most effective ways I have used in my companies is to create

a plan for every employee. These plans should be:

- **Personal** - No two employees will have the same development plan.
- **Developed interactively** – You will work with employees to develop their plans, not hand them something and say, “Here’s what we have in mind for you.”

- **Alive and evolving** – Each employee should meet often with his or her manager or mentor to review and refresh the plan and keep it exciting and new.

How to Use Individual Career Plans

Individual career plans are powerful tools to inspire, engage and retain employees. Here are some best practices that I have used, and seen work, in companies I have led:

- **During onboarding**, meet with new hires and discuss their career plans. Explore **their skills and ambitions**. What would they most like to accomplish – both for your company and for themselves? What responsibilities do they like the most? Where would they like to be in their careers in one year, in two years, and in five or more years?
- **And again during onboarding**, talk about the skills, behaviors and accomplishments that your organization values. Are your most valued employees those who build strong customer relationships, who are great team members, who think like entrepreneurs or who do something else? When employees can say, “I know what it takes to get ahead in this company,” they feel that they know the ropes and can succeed.
- **Find creative ways** for your company to help employees reach their goals. Perhaps an employee who loves working

with social media can take on a leadership role in that area. Or maybe an employee who would like to become a manager can enter your management training program.

- **Replace the concept of “bosses”** with the concept of “partners.” Managers should understand that their job is not to supervise and catch mistakes, but to develop every employee. And development takes place when they meet with the people, and they supervise to discuss how well they are moving ahead to achieve their career ambitions.
- **Replace annual job reviews** with frequent “check in” sessions. Every month or two, managers can meet individually with their reports and ask, “Since we last met, what have you done that has made you feel good about your work here . . . are there any areas where I can help?” Note that this approach is more motivating than pulling out a priority list from a previous review and saying, “You didn’t do Item #3 on the list we drew up last time . . . Why?” In those sessions, review and discuss the employee’s development plan.
- **Consider creating** a mentoring or coaching relationship for every employee. They are a powerful way to show employees that you believe they have a future with your company and will support them every step of the way.

And Continue to Invest in Training

Training empowers employees to take the steps that you have formalized in a career development plan. When a company invests in its employees, they understand that they are valued and have a future with your organization.

A Note about Millennial Workers

I have noticed that many millennials value having individual career plans that show them how to move ahead in the companies where they work. When they understand what they must do to succeed and prosper, they are happier, contribute more and stay longer.

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