

Employee Retention: Are You Part of the Problem?



By Patrick Healey

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The Employee Attraction™ Workbook]

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Why you're having a difficult time hiring good people

Simply put, there are lots of unhappy campers out there, toiling at jobs they are ill-suited for, working long hours for little or no appreciation, ready to jump ship the minute a nicer looking boat pulls alongside them. People are tired of mortgaging their souls to employers who don't understand what matters most to

regard jobs as mere stepping stones on their career path. Fifty percent of the workforce polled in a recent survey viewed their current employment as a short-term proposition of less than two years in length. In this industry it can take that long to get a team member up to speed with all the products and agency practices, so you can see how detrimental that attitude could be to your bottom line—and morale.

Here's a wakeup call: two thirds of your team doesn't want to work for you.



them. Hint: it's not their jobs! Today many employees have come to place more value on their families and personal lives than they do on their jobs. They would dearly love to enjoy their work lives more, but they don't have a clue how to make that happen. Instead, they focus on the aspects of their lives that nurture them and bring them happiness—and just expend minimum energy at the office.

According to a 2007 survey by software firm Intuit, 67 percent of people think about quitting their jobs “regularly or constantly.” In truth, if you're well on your way to becoming an **Employer of First Choice™**, then most of your team probably comes from the happy third of the statistic. Still, even if you are feeling confident in your current team, that high percentage of dissatisfaction should not be ignored; it could be lurking just off your radar.

Even when employees are reasonably happy in a job, it doesn't necessarily mean they'll stay. Loyalty is quickly becoming an antique concept, as employees

The reasons for team member dissatisfaction are limitless, but these are the biggies:

- They seek more meaning in their work, a sense of purpose
- They don't feel valued or listened to
- They're bored and crave stimulating challenges
- They don't see a meaningful future with opportunities for growth
- Their job is not connected to their passions and interests
- They are doing work that doesn't match their innate personalities and talents
- They are simply burned out from stress and in many cases juggling family concerns and personal issues with job demands

With so much potential unhappiness in your midst, I hope you're growing even more convinced of the need to make employee attraction a priority. Of

course, employee unhappiness and what you can do about it, is the whole point of my book, *Finding Joy In Your Job*. It's overflowing with exercises for your team to help them rediscover a passion for their careers. I urge you to get involved with them in working through the book. It's bound to ignite all sorts of productive conversations that will lead to better communication and understanding.

The special challenges of hiring for small businesses

While there are advantages galore to running your own agency, you just don't have the employee attraction resources the big guys have. They can hire recruitment firms, offer bigger salaries and possibly better perks. That means you need to be really creative to remain competitive when top notch employees are as hard to find as your way home in a blizzard. Replacement costs for team members soar as it takes longer and longer to find new matches.

These are just some of the costs involved:

- severance pay
- hiring temporary help, lost productivity while team handles extra duties during vacancy
- recruitment costs
- administrative time—all that paperwork
- calls to verify resumes, references
- aptitude testing
- your valuable time spent interviewing and evaluating candidates
- cost of making and negotiating a job offer
- orienting and retraining new hires
- learning curve costs

Then there are the hidden costs:

- your time just to weigh the decision to fire someone
- time lost discussing it with your team and figuring out a temporary solution
- lowered production due to poor employee morale
- potential loss of some of your customers
- diminishing customer loyalty and trust

Many experts set the replacement cost of each employee at one and half times their annual salary.

Ouch! All this makes it easy to see that **hiring the right people in the first place and then retaining those great team members needs to be a high priority.**



The workforce is becoming much more aware and savvy in determining those employers who only pay lip service to being an **Employer of First Choice™** and those who truly embody the principles. This is not just a passing phase, but an essential differentiator, as competition increases to find and retain the most qualified employees. Attracting a steady stream of high-performing employees begins with understanding what interests your ideal team member has, what his or her major struggles are and what will make her not only want to come to work for you...but feel a high degree of satisfaction in her work.

I believe there are three stages of employer awareness when it comes to being an Employer of First Choice™:

1. Dreadmill
2. Evolving
3. Magnetic

The next worksheet is a path to see where you stand now in your evolution.

WORKSHEET

Three Stages of Employer Awareness

Circle any that apply to your business. Which stage describes you best?

Attributes of a dreadmill employer

- Outdated ideas about running a business (controlling employees rather than allowing them to innovate)
- Agency ethics may be questionable
- Poor internal communication from agent to team
- No recognition of a career path for team members
- Salaries are based on “paying as little as possible”
- No encouragement for further training or education
- No recognition or reward programs for teams
- High turnover of employees
- Recruitment process is unstructured

Attributes of an evolving employer

- Open to and tries new methods and business practices
- Proud of business ethics; company values are shared with team members
- Has developed career management and training programs
- Offers flexible salary package beyond the competition
- Regular reviews of team performance; employee contributions are recognized and rewarded
- Team turnover is moderate and employee referrals are encouraged
- Uses a well-planned recruitment system and job analysis process

Attributes of a magnetic employer

- Agent is seen as an innovative leader
- Sets industry standards for business ethics
- Encourages open communication among all team members
- Offers progressive career programs and training systems
- Provides substantial employee reward and recognition programs
- Salaries, benefits and working conditions reflect innovation and flexibility
- Maintains significant employee loyalty and can even attract the best talent from competitors
- Has very low team turnover and maximizes an employee referral program
- Has strong employer branding which is utilized in recruitment
- Well defined and structured recruitment practices that are professional and use the latest testing methods to ensure a great fit with the company

Wherever you are on this continuum, it is critical to accept that it was your choices that got you to that point. Acknowledging responsibility for your own reality is crucial to effecting any real change and growth. No matter what your outside influences are, your point of power is in each and every choice you make, no matter how small it may seem. Circumstances are just excuses.

I know of a successful agent who went through a rough patch in his personal life some years ago right after a messy divorce. His agency was young, and he didn't have the kind of team to pick up his slack at a time when his attention was distracted. He could have easily lost his business in the collision of his personal and professional lives. Instead, he sucked it up, got a second job in the evenings to cover cash flow problems and even lived for a short time out of his office. He knew at his core that he had to do whatever it took to keep his dream of a successful business alive. Failure was not an option for him.

I share that story to jolt you into thinking about your own situation:

- What limiting beliefs do you have or what excuses have you made to justify lower performance?
- Who else have you blamed for your setbacks or problems?
- What story do you tell yourself over and over about why you aren't as successful as you could be?
- Can you unravel a current challenge in your business and see if it does, indeed, lead back to a decision you made?
- Was that a slap upside your ego?

That list of questions wasn't meant to be punishing or to imply that I am flawless. I'm as human as all of you, but I do like to think I have conquered the self-responsibility issue. You know what? Accepting full responsibility for your reality can be freeing, because that means changing it for the better is entirely within your control. Right now I challenge you to sign the document below, make a copy of it and keep it where you'll see it often.



My Commitment To Myself

I accept full personal responsibility for every aspect of my current reality. I acknowledge that whatever challenges I now face are the result of choices I have made. I also realize that gives me the power to change my life and my business for the better, and I commit to doing whatever it takes to do exactly that.

Signed _____

Date _____