

Limit Top Talent Turnover in Health Care

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With the economy gaining strength and the Bureau of Labor Statistics reporting increases in health care job openings, many organizations are beginning to fear losing their top talent to other hospitals or health systems. According to one study, 69 percent of employees were actively looking or willing to consider a new job in 2012¹. To help organizations develop effective retention plans, Avatar Solutions recently conducted an analysis on a randomly selected sample of exit survey data from roughly 2,500 participants. The study found that health care organizations can keep top talent by focusing their retention efforts on three main areas: recognition, career development, and trust.

Recognition

Avatar Solutions' Normative Database shows recognition is the number one key driver of employee engagement. Thus, to engage and retain workers, organizations must focus on developing effective recognition programs. When most organizations hear the words "recognition program," they often think expensive incentives that can quickly eat up their overall budget. However, in actuality, even small rewards or free incentives can engage and retain workers.

A simple "thank you for your hard work" can go a long way. In a hospital setting, one proven best practice involves managers sending hand written thank you notes to employees, recognizing them for going above and beyond their required duties. Additionally, leadership can also post positive patient comments in common areas, such that employees are publically recognized for a job well done.

To further develop recognition programs and retain top talent, managers should also ask their staff two questions: how are you currently being recognized, and how would you like to be recognized? By aligning those two questions, organizations are going one step further than the golden rule (treat employees like *you* want to be treated) and living the platinum rule (treat employees like *they* want to be treated). By tailoring recognition programs to meet the needs of employees, organizations will limit the likelihood their workers will leave for other opportunities.

Career Development

Effective career development opportunities are essential for employee retention. In the past, careers often followed clear vertical courses. However, with the recent reduction of layers of

¹ Wilkie, Christina. "Survey: 69 Percent of Employed Are Job Hunting." *Huffington Post*. October 10, 2012. <http://www.cnbc.com/id/49357575>.

management and the fact that the multigenerational workforce is moving around rather than remaining in one organization for their full careers, new challenges have cropped up.

To develop effective engagement and retention plans, management must meet with employees to understand their desired career paths. The best way to do so is for managers to build a behavioral profile for each employee to determine what career path the individual would like to follow. The profile should identify:

- Experience = what has the employee experienced in the past (i.e., work and life experiences)?
- Current Situation = what are her current motives in life (e.g., working to feed the family, padding her resume, etc.)?
- Future Ambitions = what are her career ambitions (e.g., president of the company, managerial position, content in current role, etc.)?

Once leaders and employees have worked together to develop these profiles, the next step is to create a career plan that meets each employee's experience, current situation, and future ambitions.

Consider a recently hired environmental services employee at a hospital. Within the first few months of employment, this employee should meet with his manager to discuss where he sees his career going. During the course of this conversation, the manager may discover that the employee is currently in school when not at work, and is hoping to one day become a nurse at the organization. By opening up a dialogue from the beginning, managers will better understand where their employees are coming from and where they would like to go, as well as creating a culture of open communication between all members of the team. Additionally, employees will have a better understanding of the timeline for career development, and may be more prepared to wait a little while before jumping ship.

Managers may also help employees with career development by offering the option to take additional training courses for their skill sets. Allowing employees to take classes on recent health care trends, advances in medical technology, or other areas of interest will help individuals feel they are developing their abilities without necessarily requiring a promotion. Meeting with employees and developing behavioral profiles as discussed previously will help leadership understand whether each employee would benefit from additional training.

Trust

Avatar's exit data also revealed Poor Supervisory/Management was listed as the number one reason employees left their organization. Furthermore, seven out of the top ten most unfavorable responses involved feedback/communication from direct supervisors or senior leadership. Only 43 percent of employees responded favorably to the item – *senior management of this organization was concerned about employees*. The key to increasing trust

is to become transparent. Organizations that are transparent and include employees in the decision-making process are more likely to retain top talent.

Transparency starts with a direct report's manager. More than one third of employees (35 percent) indicated they received most of their updates from their manager while 26 percent of employees noted they received most of their information from coworkers. In contrast, roughly 52 percent of employees preferred to get updates from their direct supervisor and only six percent wished to receive updates from their coworkers. Since managers are the desired line of communication, they need to be transparent and effective communicators to build or maintain trust.

Senior management is also crucial in earning and sustaining employees' trust. The Avatar data showed the fact that the visibility of senior leadership has a strong correlation with employees' perceptions that senior management is concerned about their employees. A proven best practice is to encourage senior management to attend department meetings and use common gathering areas (e.g., cafeteria, break room, etc.) to increase their visibility, build strong relationships, and strengthen employees' trust.

Establishing an open door policy among managers, employees, and senior management will also help teams form trusting relationships. Nurses should feel comfortable speaking with their supervisors and sharing their concerns, and managers should encourage this type of dialogue. By building a culture where every individual trusts his peers and leaders, you will create an organization that employees will find hard to leave.

Conclusion

Organizations must focus on recognition, career development, and trust if they want to engage and retain their high performers. By constantly measuring and applying these three drivers of engagement, health care organizations everywhere will be more able to build an engaging work culture and limit top talent turnover.

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