

MAKE EMPLOYEE RETENTION A TOP PRIORITY

The expression, "good help is hard to find," has never been more accurate. Competition for talented workers is intense in most locations and specialties, and the "best of the best" know it. If they're unsatisfied with their current job, they have no qualms about looking for something else.

Retailing motivated, productive employees is a critical concern for small business owners, as they often play a key role in the growth and success of the enterprise. A survey by Robert Half International, conducted by an independent research firm, examined the reasons that "top" employees, those considered good performers by their bosses, left the business. Here's what they found:

- Limited advancement opportunity: 39%
- Unhappy with management: 23%
- Lack of recognition: 17%
- Inadequate salary/benefits: 11%
- Bored: 6%
- Lifestyle change, such as moving: 2%
- Other/don't know: 2%

The message for business owners is clear, says Max Messmer, CEO of Robert Half. "Helping top performers reach their goals is essential to keeping them. The best employees are ambitious and may not stay in a job long if it lacks growth potential."

Retaining good employees can be a challenge to small business, particularly when compensation or advancement is involved, but it's not an insurmountable one. If promotions aren't an option at your business, you can still find ways to reward

extra effort. It doesn't have to be money. If budgets are tight, consider a more flexible schedule or larger workspace. Praise should be frequent and personalized, but it does not have to be costly or time consuming. A simple thank you note can be an effective motivator.

Take the pulse of employee perceptions in your business. Are they happy doing what they do? Ask their opinions on the work environment and changes that might enhance their loyalty.

Also remember that like any other important business asset, employees require their own form of care and maintenance. Bringing in temporary help during crunch times is one way to ease the workload and prevent burnout. Engage your employees in finding ways to add some fun to the workplace, especially for jobs that involve a lot of repetition. The resulting increase in morale and camaraderie will boost not only loyalty to your company, but also its productivity.

To learn more about employment issues facing your small business, contact SCORE "Counselors to America's Small Business." SCORE is a nonprofit organization of more than 10,500 volunteer business counselors who provide free, confidential business counseling and training workshops to small business owners. Call 610.327.2673 for the Pottstown SCORE office or request online counseling by visiting www.pottstown-score.org.

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