

Inside Leadership



Your manager's biggest concern? Keeping your talent on board.



Trish Horan of HRM Executive Recruitment explains in tight labour markets retaining talent is key.

In a recent survey of HR professionals in Ireland, Retaining Talent rated as the number one HR priority for their organisations. If you currently manage professional staff then you understand the challenge that this represents.

Two years ago, managers in every sector were being asked to decide who to let go, now they are working out how to keep their critical skills on-board, often with substantially reduced resources available to them. According to the above HRM survey, nearly 80% of companies have made some cuts to their compensation schemes since 2009 and half of all organisations have ceased paying staff bonuses. This means organisations

have had to find new and creative ways to keep their valuable employees focussed and aligned.

In *Inside Leadership - Compensation Strategies*, C&B specialist Pat Gurren, talks about how you can apply reduced resources to maximum effect and achieve desired results. But what if your organisation really simply does not have additional resources available? Are there other ways in which managers can keep their high performers and keep them performing?

In praise, of praise

Most employees recognise and accept the financial constraints their

managers are faced with and have adjusted to the reality that their compensation is not going to change dramatically for the better any time soon. Recognition is for many, the new currency. Praise for a job well done, costs nothing and is simple to deliver. Yet how often has your manager overlooked this? Indeed if you are a people manager, do you seek out and praise your employees?

As executive recruiters we regularly hear professional candidates say they are leaving their managers, rather than their organisations, with a lack of recognition or appreciation often cited as the principle reason. Praise is a key, cost-neutral retention tool and most

effective when targeted on effort by the employee that is beyond normal expectation and linked to a specific action. It is at its weakest when used inconsistently across employees or for ordinary and expected performances. Or worse, with any trace of insincerity.

Gaining through training

More than any other aspect to a new job, training opportunities are now the most frequently sought feature by professional candidates. But two thirds of organisations in Ireland recently surveyed, have cut training budgets. Yet training can have a mutual benefit for the employer and the employee. If additional cash compensation is not available, a case can be made to at least invest in the development of skills which have an immediate benefit to the employer and an additional career value to the employee.

Even if your organisation does not have a budget for learning and development, training does not have to be expensive. Employees presented with new tasks or activities, supported through structured coaching by a senior executive in the company and recognised for the achievement of this task or activity, are less likely to consider alternative jobs. In fact, many of the leading organisations with whom we work, are discovering that recognition and development can go hand in hand. Now they ask high performing employees to create and deliver training on a skill or activity at which they excel. This throws a

spotlight on the employee's ability and achievement and deepens their expertise in the area. It also provides a low cost, high value training opportunity for organisations and highlights the value that is placed on performance.

Bending the rules

The temptation for a lot of managers in difficult times, is to seek much more from their employees. If you are a people manager, you may well have done this over the last two years. You may have experienced the additional work load factor personally. Many companies, dangerously, have got themselves into the habit of expecting their employees to be continuously grateful for their jobs, "*in the current climate*". As executive recruiters, we also see a tendency for some organisations and their managers in challenging times, to increase the intensity and control around the performance of their employees. Much like a parent does when they fear for the safety of their child. Rather than drive performance, this shift only serves to demotivate employees and frustrates them at a time, when they are already dealing with disimproved working conditions.

Again like a lot of parents, some organisations underestimate the ability of their employees (or children!) to get what is happening around them and to be able to respond in an appropriate manner. Employees know the challenges that their

organisations face and at the same time are dealing with many new stressful elements in their own lives. A little more flexibility or independence from a manager is much more effective. In fact professional executives, when asked about the aspects of their organisations they most value, invariably talk about being given extra personal time off, often as a form of performance reward or recognition. It appears gestures like these also demonstrate an attitude of confidence in the future that high performers want to see.

From the hundreds of professional candidates we meet each week, it seems some managers feel they are the only people taking responsibility for change. This is of course not the case, but the gap in perception seems to correlate with absence of communication. As an employee, one needs to know what is happening. Managers need to understand employees can only respond to what they see and hear. While not a panacea nor a guarantee of long term retention, communication does reduce fear and anxiety. It also improves employee decision making and helps them see, that the organisation recognises and respects the employee's contribution to compete in a more challenging World.

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