

Carol's Top Ten Best Practices for Retention



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To retain top talent, many companies would do well to take a page from the books of companies who already have high levels of employee satisfaction and retention. Through her work with multinational organizations and small start-ups, Carol Barber has developed a list of best practices followed by those companies who enjoy great morale and high retention.

1. They know who they are and hire for "fit"

Through employee focus groups, external perception studies and continuous self-examination, these companies have an understanding of their cultures and the personality traits that lead to success within them. They are very often not disturbed over a longer than average time-to-fill, as they, with their employees' endorsement, would rather have a job go unfilled than fill it with the wrong person. Their employees have told me they prefer to carry more of a load for a period of time than work with less than "A" players.

One of my HR clients once told me, "This is a very demanding and competitive environment. We look for people who will thrive under those circumstances." While some workers would perceive demanding and competitive as downright undesirable, others would be highly stimulated by it. Recruiting for that company is always skewed to the latter group, and not surprising, its retention rate is very impressive.

2. They sweat the details of on-boarding

Since these companies put so much into recruiting the right talent, they don't want people falling through the cracks when they start work. They have well-planned on-boarding processes to help employees quickly assimilate and begin to contribute. And, just to make sure they're doing the right thing, they ask for post-hire feedback on the hiring and on-boarding process. When I've conducted these types of interviews with employees in best-practice companies, they always share amazement over how great the entire experience was. And wouldn't you know, they almost always have ideas for how it could have been improved, which my clients are happy to hear and consider.

3. They set clear expectations and objectives

These companies see employees as partners in the business, and provide them with every detail of what's expected and how their performance will be measured. All of them conduct regular employee performance reviews, but more than that, they've trained their supervisors and managers to provide continuous feedback. This eliminates any surprise element from performance reviews and gives employees specific, job-related areas for focus and/or improvement. Many workers have told me how much they appreciate knowing where they stand all the time.

4. They provide training and development at all levels

Employees have told me their company's commitment to employee development is a key reason for staying. Today's workers know how quickly things are changing, and they want to work with companies that will help them keep their skills and knowledge at the cutting edge. And, of course, training and development activities, coupled with career growth based on mastering new skills, have wondrous effects on employee morale and satisfaction.

5. They don't wait for trouble to find them

Rather than taking a no news is good news posture, these companies have devised ways to keep tabs on their workforces' pulse. Any change in mood or attitude is important to them, and they prefer to deal with issues before they fester into big problems. Whether through employee relations specialists, confidential feedback processes or employee focus groups, best-practice companies never shy away from learning the truth or dealing with what they learn.

6. They value open communications above all else

Best-practice companies are where you find CEOs who post their own performance reviews for everyone to see. They're where employees hear about business initiatives and/or results before the outside world does. These companies place a huge emphasis on building internal communications tools, like Intranet sites and web-based conferencing platforms, to keep their employees informed and engaged. The last people they want to surprise are their own team members.

7. They believe in work/life balance

These are companies that recognize their employees juggle the demands of family, work and life in general. To ensure their employees can manage it all, they lead the way in paid time off, job sharing, flexible scheduling and many alternative work arrangements. They would rather have people on the job who can focus and produce at top levels, than people who are too exhausted and stressed out to think straight.

8. They view workforce diversity as a competitive advantage

In today's business world, enlightened companies realize their customers come from all walks of life and have distinct opinions, desires and needs. Best-practice companies aggressively pursue top talent from diverse backgrounds as a catalyst for growth and success. But, they don't stop there. They ensure collaboration and understanding among employees through diversity training, affinity networks and cultural awareness programs.

9. They understand the power of teamwork

Employees in high-performing companies have told me how exciting it is to work on complex projects--some of which may cross international boundaries--and discover that no matter where their coworkers are from or located, the level of commitment to driving results is always the same. It seems to me best-practice companies know that teamwork fosters confidence, trust and respect among employees.

10. They never think they have it right

The best-practice companies I've worked with are inclined to shrug off accolades and recognition with comments like, "We think we can do better." It's not false modesty, they mean it. That's why they're always exploring new ways to understand what their employees want and need to succeed. It's a continuous loop of quality improvement. As one of my clients said to me, "The minute we think we have it nailed, we're dead."