

Is Your Company Bleeding Talent?

How to become a true "employer of choice"

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What does the phrase "becoming an employer of choice" mean? For many organizations, it refers to their strategies to attract talented employees. And once an organization has done the hard work of recruiting top performers, the next step is to figure out how to keep them.

A few years ago, The Gallup Organization decided to initiate a multi-year research project to try and define a great workplace. First, we needed to define what "great" was. We decided that a great workplace was one where employees were satisfied with their jobs. However, it couldn't really be considered "great" if it didn't produce positive business outcomes.

Using a technique called meta-analysis, we sifted through data from approximately 200,000 employees in 36 organizations and across 21 different industries to find links to five business outcomes: retention, productivity, profitability, customer loyalty and safety. We identified 12 questions that most effectively measured the links (the Gallup Q12). The results of our research are summarized in the table below.

	Retention	Customer	Safety	Productivity	Profitability
Opportunities to learn and grow Progress in last six months	X	X	X	X	X
Best friend Coworkers committed to quality Mission/Purpose of company My opinions count	X	X	X	X	X
Encourages development Supervisor/Someone at work cares Recognition last seven days Do what I do best every day	X	X	X	X	X
Materials and equipment Know what is expected of me at work	X	X	X	X	

X - strongest generalizable relationships across companies
x - positive generalizable relationships across companies

Let's focus on the issue of retention. Our analysis found that retention is strongly related to six of the Q12 items.

Know what is expected of me at work

First, do your employees know exactly what is expected of them? When they walk in the door everyday, can they measure their progress against well-defined goals? If they can't, they may never have a sense of achievement in their role. If expectations are unclear, employees will inevitably face frustration, and will be open for other opportunities where they do know what's expected of them, and where their contributions are measured and recognized.

Materials and equipment

Do you supply the right tools to support the skills, experience and talents of your employees? Even Tiger Woods would find it difficult to get the ball close to the green with a sand wedge from 270 yards. He obviously has the talent, but he would not have the right tools. Similarly, your employees need the right tools and equipment to perform their jobs at an optimum level.

Do what I do best every day

Are your employees cast in the right roles? Just because an individual is gifted in a particular area, it does not mean he has a full array of talents for any and every role. Big talent sometimes is very specialized and narrow, and knowing each employee's boundaries and limitations is key to avoiding burnout. For example, if an individual is an excellent speaker, do you also assume she is a great teacher? Some individuals do combine both these abilities, but the performance demands for these roles are very different. Knowing the critical demands for every role is a key to ensuring that talents fit those demands.

Supervisor/Someone at work cares

Do your valued employees know that someone at work cares about them -- preferably their manager or supervisor? If they don't, your company will find it difficult to retain them. Your employees' relationship with their manager or supervisor is critical in turning talent into lasting performance and excellence. In addition, is there an ongoing dialogue and solid communication with your best employees? Do your managers spend most of their time with their most productive talent? Many managers give their greatest degree of attention to employees who are falling behind. Talented, productive people crave time and attention from their managers, and will leave your company if they have a weak relationship (or no relationship) with their manager or supervisor.

Co-workers committed to quality

Do you surround your stars with other individuals who are constantly driving standards of quality to a higher level? Many companies arbitrarily put teams together without considering that employees only psychologically commit to teams if they perceive their team members will support their high level of commitment and performance. Talented employees set high standards and depend upon those around them to support their growth toward excellence.

Opportunities to learn and grow

Does your company create an environment that encourages employees to drive towards innovation or to create better systems for more productive results? Talented employees need to be "stretched" in just the right ways to fully engage them. We all need to look back and see that we are truly progressing and learning, and that we're achieving new levels of personal and professional growth. Great managers always ask what skills and knowledge need to accompany talent to result in the greatest outcome for each person.

According to our research, there is nothing very complicated about retaining great talent – these six elements are the keys. If you want to keep the talented employees you recruit, your company must:

- Be clear about what you expect from your employees
- Provide employees with the materials and equipment they need to perform their jobs
- Give employees opportunities to do what they do best, every day
- Ensure that your employees have a manager or supervisor who cares about them
- Surround talented employees with co-workers who have a similar drive for quality
- Provide opportunities for employees to learn and grow

Companies who can do these things will be successful in keeping their most talented employees. Those who cannot will continue to bleed talent, and their quest to become an "employer of choice" will continue to be hazardous to their health.

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