

## Getting employees on board and motivated takes extra effort

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The business world is a tough place for employers.

Globalization, competition and rising health care costs are among factors that can challenge companies to find and retain employees, not to mention keep them motivated and open to new ideas, experts say.

According to a report by Watson Wyatt Worldwide, as employers try to hold down costs they continue to shift away from a paternalistic relationship with employees by offering less job security, reducing benefits and increasing emphasis on performance-based pay.

"To attract and retain top talent in a cost-effective way, employers must focus on what motivates employees and act accordingly," says Mike Ellis, managing consultant at the Houston office of Watson Wyatt Worldwide. "In addition to driving commitment, employers should also communicate company goals and link them to individual goals -- or create line of sight -- to better engage employees and, ultimately, drive company success."

According to Ellis, the reasons key employees leave organizations are pay, promotional opportunities and work/ life balance. Many companies have an incomplete understanding of how employees value these areas and, as a result, have less committed employees.

"No single factor creates an environment that makes employees want to stay," Ellis explains. "Rather, it is a combination of elements that contribute to employee commitment."

"Employers who report no problem in retaining employees achieve this in a number of ways. Interestingly, they look at each plan independently when reviewing the competitiveness of their reward plans, but they are moving toward a total rewards view by combining the results and evaluating the pay and benefit package as a whole."

Employers who experience no retention problems are also moving beyond commitment and creating employee engagement by communicating important connections between employees and the organization, he says.

Following are some insights shared by Houston experts on a variety of human resource issues:

What can recruiters do to hold on to a good candidate who has other offers?

*Norman Schippers Capital H Group [www.capitalhgroup.com](http://www.capitalhgroup.com)*

Today, those responsible for recruiting talent for their organizations are basically climbing a mountain without a sight line to the peak. Positions need to be filled yesterday. Candidates need to be stellar, or at the very least, better than those the competition is hiring. Electronic job boards have resulted in a proliferation of résumés to screen. Salary data banks have made it easy for qualified candidates to shop for better opportunities.

Most recruiters are finding it difficult to take time to evaluate whether their overall process is working. Some are outsourcing all or part (such as sourcing candidates or pre-screening candidates) of the recruiting process.

Another option is to conduct a formal evaluation of the process that addresses questions such as:

- What employer branding, sourcing and advertising strategies are being used? Are they working?
- What process gaps, roadblocks, challenges and opportunities for improvement exist?
- What is the optimal structure of the current recruiting function? Should recruiting be centralized or decentralized? What can be outsourced?
- What technology, metrics and other measures will best serve the employer's needs?
- What responsibilities should the recruiting team, hiring managers and other stakeholders have?

With this knowledge in hand, organizations can better integrate all key aspects of the recruiting process -- people, process, strategies and technology, for a more cost-effective and efficient model.

How can managers avoid what is seen by employees as fickle decision making?

*James A. Haudan President and CEO Root Learning Inc. [www.rootlearning.com](http://www.rootlearning.com)*

Many companies launch dozens of initiatives that are eventually abandoned midstream, creating a "flavor-of-the-month" reaction from employees.

In these cases, it's likely that managers haven't taken time to connect the dots between actions that appear to be in direct conflict with one another.

Consider the manufacturer who launched an initiative to reduce inventory and improve customer service. The employee reaction was, "Yeah ... right!" However, that was exactly what was required.

If initiatives that appear to contradict each other make sense to managers and leaders, how can they be so meaningless to the front line? It's simple. Most strategies contain paradoxes that need to be understood at a deeper level. The key is to understand the "and"

and not assume it's an "either/or" proposition. Understanding the "and" is one of the best cures for the flavor-of-the-month syndrome.

Managers should stress the language of and. Taking sides is an art form in many organizations. Emphasize the importance of the and. Explain why we need to cut costs and spend more wisely on innovation.

Create a burden-busting environment. New initiatives are viewed as passing fads because no one ever takes away old work. Most organizations just keep piling on new stuff. The appetite for new work increases if everyone works to spot burden-busters -- anything they are doing that is redundant or not adding value. Watch what happens when people realize that they can stop activities that no longer make sense.

How can the HR department engage employees in a company's mission in order to increase productivity and reduce turnover?

*Tom Mayer Regional sales manager O.C. Tanner Co. [www.octanner.com](http://www.octanner.com)*

It is imperative for HR people to confidently take a position at the strategic table and opine for tools and services that facilitate recognition within the organization. It's what employees want. It's the foundation on which successful organizations are built. And research shows that, across-the-board, employees want to be recognized for their efforts.

A survey of 200,000 employees confirms that people who work for managers who recognize their contributions effectively and often are more satisfied with their jobs, more engaged in their work and more likely to stick around. Conversely, those employees who work for managers who are poor, infrequent recognizers may be looking for new jobs at this very moment.

There are plenty of tools, resources and programs available for managers to recognize their teams. But it takes an HR-led approach and buy-in from senior leadership to really get managers involved and moving. Once managers realize that recognition is not just an HR flavor-of-the-month campaign, but a total renovation of corporate culture aimed at getting real business results and backed by senior leadership, they will follow.

Can a company be held criminally liable for hiring employees without proper documentation?

*Jeremy D. Saenz Partner Monty Partners LLP [www.montypartners.com](http://www.montypartners.com)*

Unfortunately, the answer could be yes. The government has instituted a startling new trend in their war against illegal immigrants as federal agencies are now targeting employers under tougher criminal statutes. Using money laundering and harboring statutes, the government is now penalizing companies by seizing assets and handing out jail time. The government is even charging employers under laws usually reserved for organized crime.

In the past, the Department of Homeland Security focused on enforcing administrative fines and doling out sanctions when employers failed to properly document their employees' eligibility to work. The department's new strategy includes harsher penalties such as criminal prosecutions against managers and executives of companies.

Now, more than ever, employers must ensure that employees are legal and that they and their companies are in compliance with immigration laws. They should ensure all I-9s are filled out completely with proper documentation from List A or List B & C (listed on the I-9 form.) They should also consider enrolling in the U.S. Citizen of Immigration Services' Basic Pilot Program to obtain automated confirmation of employment eligibility to work. Another proactive step employers can take is to have a "mock" I-9 audit conducted on their work force.

**If a company needs outside help recruiting employees, how should the process be implemented to ensure a smooth transition?**

*Scott Beardsley, vice president, managed recruiting Quantum Solutions for Business*

**One of the most critical factors for a company considering outsourcing its recruiting is the willingness of its hiring managers to accept change. "Change management" can be the biggest obstacle in implementing something as large and complex as recruitment process outsourcing.**

**Recruitment process outsourcing is highly visible in a company because it has the potential to touch so many people in the organization with the responsibility to hire. If it fails, everyone knows it and it looks bad. If the hiring managers don't make a commitment to the process, they will gradually migrate back to old recruiting habits and, most likely, decide that the process didn't work for them.**

**Companies should first determine if the hiring managers are ready for change. Do they currently like the recruiting methods used and will they dislike changing the status quo, or vice versa?**

**Also, consider the timing and workload and determine if hiring managers are able to change. Too much change at one time has the potential to overwhelm managers.**

**Is the organization able to deal with the ripple effect that any kind of change, positive or negative, can bring to an organization? Has the implementation team been properly notified and well prepared?**

**Once the decision is made, much depends on the strength of the recruitment process outsourcing provider to focus on change management throughout the early stages of implementation.**

**What can an employer do to prevent domestic violence from spilling over into the workplace?**

*Katherine Greene President, Gulf Coast Region Verizon Wireless*

Domestic violence is not just a domestic problem. Often, this tragic situation spills into the workplace, creating hardship for not only the victim and family members but for his or her colleagues and the company's bottom line through decreased productivity, increased absenteeism, employee turnover, lost time dealing with domestic issues and an increase in health care costs. The impact of domestic violence can cost American companies up to \$5 billion annually.

Employers may find themselves legally liable for not protecting employees from domestic violence. The Family Violence Prevention Fund estimates that jury awards for inadequate security suits average close to \$1.2 million nationally and settlements average \$600,000.

Employers can:

- Be aware of physical or behavioral changes in employees and consult human resources or the employee assistance program for advice.
- Instruct managers and supervisors to be respectful of employees' concerns and choices.
- Assess safety and security issues with employees.
- Use internal publications (newsletters, Intranet, etc.) to educate employees about domestic violence and how it affects the workplace.
- Establish an employee assistance program (EAP) if one is not present.

Safety measures in an office setting can be as easy and inexpensive as providing victims with a temporary cell phone to increase safety to and from work, allowing the individual to work flexible hours so that the employee's schedule is unpredictable or temporarily transferring the employee to a different office site.

The most important action an employer can take, however, is to create a supportive environment for victims and a no-tolerance policy for domestic violence within the community.