

Re-recruiting your top performers

We've all heard stories of couples who stopped courting soon after they were married. Often,



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this is later identified as the first step in a gradual decline that ends in a failed relationship. Unfortunately, the same thing can happen in an employment relationship.

Re-recruiting mid- and top-level performers is critical, especially as the economy continues to improve and jobs become more plentiful.

So, how does one go about re-recruiting? Again, our analogy of a successful marriage provides some clues.

Re-recruiting your best employees involves maintaining that same level of mutual excitement and commitment that existed pri-

or to and during their early employment.

Dating couples build each other up via compliments. The on-the-job equivalent is consistently recognizing a job well done. Effective recognition possesses the following elements:

- **Genuine** — The recipient knows it is heartfelt.

- **Timely** — It occurs immediately after the effort.

- **Personal** — It fits the unique traits and interests of the individual (e.g., a strong introvert will likely be much more comfortable with a one-on-one conversation than an announcement at an all-employee meeting).

How powerful is recognition?

In 1974 Bill Bergan was beginning his fourth season as the men's cross country coach at Iowa State University. Over the previous 25 years, ISU had placed last 21 times and second-to-last four times in the Big Eight Conference Meet. In Bill's words:

"That fall we won Iowa State's first title since 1931. Johnny Ma-

jors was the most admired and most popular personality on campus, and he was in the middle of an exciting football season. Yet, he took time to come by State Gym and offer congratulations. It's been 40 years, but I still recall his gesture."

Genuine, timely and personal. That simple act of recognition has stuck with Bergan throughout a career that went on to include 25 conference titles in track and cross country, a pair of NCAA cross country championships and induction into multiple halls of fame.

Investing in developing employees by providing honest feedback, access to pertinent training, challenging new job assignments and opportunities sends an unmistakable message that they are valued.

Top performers get much more done than their peers because they're always finding a better way — they work smarter. Make sure that they're compensated accordingly. Don't let rigid job classifications and pay scales confine you if an employee is regularly ex-

ceeding expectations. Get creative.

Make sure you maintain a positive culture within your workplace. Ensure that low performers don't eat up an inordinate amount of your time. Make expectations clear, provide the resources required for them to succeed, but hold them accountable. Low performers will leave (or be dismissed) because they aren't willing to meet your expectations, or top performers will leave because they're tired of carrying the low performers.

It's vital to understand employees' personal goals and to share how the organization is performing and where it is going. This provides confidence that continuing the relationship is in the best interests of both parties.

I recently heard the story of a woman who was retire early because the joy was gone from her work. Basically she just didn't feel valued. During her retirement ceremony, she was shocked to see her boss sobbing. It was the first time in years that she felt appreciated. Don't be that supervisor.



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