

HUMAN RESOURCES



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“Santa..... ...Where Have All My Employees Gone?”

written by Lisa Powers, PHR - President/Owner of Career Options

If one reviews Santa’s hiring practices and employee retention, he seems to really know what he is doing! He has not lost a single reindeer to fly his sleigh in hundreds of years and his elves seem to come back year after year! This is despite working in freezing temperatures at the North Pole and being overworked each season only to be forgotten by Dec. 26! As we look at Santa, we cannot help to compare things to our own organizations. What have you been doing to retain and motivate key personnel? How will you do in 2009?

After the economy took a turn for the worse in September 2001, many employees had no choice but to stay with their employer because companies were not hiring. These people chose to stay rather than risk having the least seniority in a poor economy. At this time in 2008, we are seeing some of the same reluctance to leave jobs. However, when it improves, (and it will), many employees will be exploring other opportunities.

First, we have to understand why key employees leave organizations.

I interview hundreds of people each year and am amazed at the similarity in their reasoning for leaving a company. Some reasons are beyond your control as a manager, while others can be the direct result of a management style.

Some of their MAIN reasons are:

Their company is in financial turmoil.

This is one of the few reasons that may be beyond your control as a manager. In many cases, managers do not have direct control regarding major financial decisions.

They are not being compensated fairly.

While compensation is an important aspect, please know that it is rarely the ONLY reason a person chooses to leave. This may also be beyond your control if upper management does not understand what the Fox Valley and surrounding area is paying and has unrealistic pay scales that you are tied to.

However, the following reasons ARE within your control as a manager.

Employees no longer feel challenged.

Here, I am not referring to advancement or climbing the corporate ladder because that is not for everyone. Instead, this has to do with the chance to learn new things or have additional job responsibilities. Boredom causes huge dissatisfaction in jobs! If we look at Santa’s elves each year, they are excited to build new and exciting toys.....not just dolls and red wagons. 80% stay in their current jobs since Santa may not need 200 managers, but they are okay, as long as they get to cross train in other areas and be challenged in new ways.

There is nowhere else to go or advance to!

Surprisingly, many employees are told they are “too valuable” in their current position. Their supervisors do not want to lose them so they discourage other departments from taking their best employees.

But what happens in this case? What occurs if managers are afraid of losing their best employee and fail to offer new opportunities? The answer is simple: the employee eventually leaves anyway for a company that can offer new opportunities and upward mobility.

They leave because of POOR managers and supervisors.

This includes negative managers, poor decision makers or leaders, or non-supportive (or non-motivating) supervisors. It is amazing how long a loyal employee will stay (even in a bad situation) if they have a great relationship with their supervisor.

Their current culture is non-family orientated and non-flexible.

More and more men and women are seeking balanced lives. They are not looking to work 70 hours a week anymore. Instead, they are searching for companies that allow flexible schedules.

And many leave simply because they are not feeling respected or valued by the company as a whole.

Personnel devote endless hours at their jobs, take continuing education classes, and strive for 110% without so much as a "Thank You" or "Way to go!" Santa is wonderful..... He is in the chaos with the elves, patting them on the back, and thanking them for a job well done!

One of my previous clients was excellent with showing their appreciation. They used a very simple form during the employee orientation process. It asked each person to list their favorite foods, candies, stores, restaurants, and hobbies. It also asked if they liked to be recognized in front of co-workers or privately. Because they did not have a large budget, they used this form throughout the year to recognize employees with a gift certificate, movie pass or other small token of appreciation.

Remember, as the economy improves, unsatisfied employees will start looking elsewhere for employment. Here are some things to think of BEFORE they have one foot out the door.

1. Don't Wait For the Two-Week Notice

The time to show your gratitude is when an employee is an active, vital member of your team. The time to identify and fix problems is before they become reasons to look for a new job.

2. Make New Employees Feel Welcome

Once the first-day paperwork is completed, spend a half hour or so talking with the employee about your organization and his or her role in it. This will send a strong message that the new person is valued and important.

Santa did this as well and took care of Rudolf from day one.....welcoming and nurturing his spirit and soul!

3. Have Fun

Use your imagination! Some of the best ideas may even cost less money, but they are priceless when it comes to boosting employee morale.

12 years ago, when I started working at Career Options, I did not want to show my personal side or show a sense of humor for fear of losing respect. However, that is not who I am. I eventually learned that it is "okay" to break down the barrier and have a fun, yet still professional environment. It is much more fun to come to work when everyone WANTS to be there!

4. Practice What You Preach

When employees detect mixed signals and broken promises, they grow more resentful each and every day. Employees are often asked to bend over backward for the company, but the company has to bend a little, too. When you practice what you preach, you do not just have employees, you have partners that are willing to stick with you through the tough times as well as the good times.

When Christmas rolls around, you can see Santa right in the mix of things! He is working alongside all the elves late into the night to be sure everything gets done! The elves may not be happy about working extra hours, but if they see Santa pitching in too, they will be far less likely to complain!

Santa may not have it all figured out yet, but he sure has some strong leadership skills. Kids everywhere will be happy to hear that he does not have any layoffs in store this year NOR has his lead reindeer resigned for a better position somewhere else. Lead and motivate your own team today and you will be surprised at their loyalty and dedication in the future!

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