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Employee Retention by Cinnamon Epley

It's an age-old problem: You hire the perfect candidate, send them through orientation, invest the time to train them and everything is just hunky-dory. Then BOOM! They hand in their resignation within a matter of months.

Of course, there is nothing undesirable about the position or your practice or the geographical area. Your compensation is competitive and the benefits package is great. So why can't you retain good employees?

Even some of the most well run practices experience this problem. Replacing an employee is a very costly endeavor. When you factor in what it costs for orientation, training, benefits, paid vacation time and lost production, we're talking thousands of dollars. When you factor in how turnover has a negative effect on employee morale, losing employees is unacceptably expensive. We are talking about a replacement cost in the ballpark of \$42,000 for a regular med/surg RN and \$64,000 for a specialty nurse.

There is an alternative: Keep your employees happy and they will stay and not be vulnerable to outside recruitment. But how? Below you will find some tried and true methods to help you not only retain your employees, but also boost morale, cause your team to run smoothly (even with less supervision) and get them to remain extremely loyal to you.

Employers know that they have to give their customers/patients good service in order to keep the bottom line in the black and keep the shareholders happy. Alas, most do not realize that if you treat your staff like gold, you will enjoy happy patients and shareholders alike.

Out of frustration, often times employers resort to micromanagement and brow beating their staff that is left while grasping at straws trying to make things run more smoothly. Of course those things will always have the opposite effect. Some people think if they pay their people more, they will not have turnover.

Believe it or not, the top reasons people leave their job is not for the lack of salary. Instead employees quit because:

1. They do not feel like they belong – they are not part of the team.
2. They do not feel valued.
3. They feel like they are under appreciated and overworked.

One of my clients, Keith Gregory with The Jones Clinic in Memphis, Tennessee has a model staff working with him at their outpatient oncology practice. His employees get along great with each other, their quality of care is exceptional and turnover is low. And he is nestled in an area where there are a lot of other oncology practices vying for excellent talent.

Is he magic? Well, almost. Amongst other things, Mr. Gregory often brings in Starbucks coffee for his nurses, brings in a massage therapist so everyone can enjoy a 45-minute massage, and slips them a note of simple appreciation when they have done a particularly good job. On occasion, when they have an extremely busy schedule planned for a certain day, he even brings in a local company that makes smoothies between 10:00 AM and 2:00 PM and serves them to all of the employees and patients.

Here are some super simple, inexpensive and extremely effective ways to win your employees' admiration, respect and loyalty. If you want more ideas, just contact me and I will be happy to share many more with you.

- Have lunch catered in – especially during busy days, when employees may not get time to take a proper lunch. It doesn't have to be fancy to be effective. If they ask, "What's the occasion?" simply tell them you appreciate that they are working so hard.
- Acknowledge and celebrate birthdays with singing and cake. Also celebrate tenure and perfect attendance with a lunch and public recognition.
- Have company and/or departmental get-togethers like picnics, happy hours, holiday parties, bowling, etc. When you choose to employ one of these informal galas, have your employees get involved in the planning process. These are not only fun, but they provide time and opportunity for your team to learn more about each other and build relationships. Team unity ensures not only better quality work, but decreases turnover because people are less likely to leave a job when they feel like a part of the team.
- When a person has done a particularly good job, instead of public recognition, leave a short note on their desk letting them know you appreciate what they've done.
- Implement a program where employees acknowledge each other when one has been a particularly good teammate. You provide the "kudos" gift and the employees

acknowledge the others publicly. When an employee collects a certain number of peer acknowledgements, they get a prize! You can use things like lottery tickets, coffee cards, movie tickets, etc. It doesn't have to be expensive to be fun.

- Greet your employees by name when going by their desk or when passing them in the hall. That just goes back to our own name being the sweetest sound.

- Stop micromanaging and implement a true open door policy. I know once you've started micromanaging, it's hard to stop. But please try it for a prolonged period of time. What you will begin to see that, if your door is truly open and you trust your staff to do their jobs, they will actually start coming to you and telling you what's going on and asking for advice on how to make certain things run more smoothly. Of course, you need to be encouraging to them along the way. It also helps if you set aside a specific time each week to meet with each person so that they get comfortable with talking with you one-on-one regularly.

The management in my company treats me extremely well. We often go to lunch (on the company's dime,) we have company get-togethers, contests with very nice rewards, such as weekend getaways and spa treatments (NICE!) and fancy dinners. I get juicy monthly and quarterly bonuses based on performance and I get recognized publicly. But what makes me feel the best is when Steve Odell, the owner of our company, takes some time out of his busy schedule (which he does regularly) to pull up a chair in my office to see how things are going with my projects and lets me know how much he appreciates me being here.

The funny thing is, I know I am doing a good job. I have trophies and plaques in my office, coins in my pocket and a happy bank account that tells me so. But when he lets me know what he thinks of me, I feel valuable. I feel like I am making a difference instead of just a paycheck. The other "perks" are terrific, don't get me wrong. But what will keep me here until I retire is the simple fact that he lets me know that I am appreciated.

It will take some time on your part and some effort, but I promise you that by just implementing some of these little things will make a huge difference for you. Good employees are an extremely valuable asset in any industry. But with the shortage of qualified healthcare professionals, it is vital to develop and maintain a good staff.



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