

Retention in the age of COVID: Why employers are worried



Employee retention may not

immediately come to mind as a concern for employers looking at the highest unemployment rate in years. It pays to remember, though, that the ability to generate a large pool of applicants does not always translate into easily finding people who meet your needs.

Employment-hungry job seekers frequently throw their hat in the ring for any position for which they might seem somewhat suited. Evaluating their qualifications taxes already time-pressed HR departments. Then, getting new hires trained and up-to-speed takes additional efforts. Savvy leaders realize that retaining quality employees already on the payroll saves time and comes with the benefit of greater certainty about what you're getting.

In a survey conducted by the staffing firm Robert Half in summer 2020, 47 percent of senior managers stated that they are "very concerned" about their [company's ability to retain valued staff](#). Another 41 percent acknowledge that they are "somewhat concerned."

Why the worry that current employees may not stick around?

Lack of monetary incentive

Many companies experienced a hard year financially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some organizations

instituted salary freezes or even reductions, and year-end bonuses appear unlikely. Workers at such places may deem it in their best interest to seek out an employer that can offer more money; some may switch to a higher-paying occupation.

Lack of geographical requirements

Moving to remote operations eliminates the need to hold a job within commuting distance of one's house. This situation opens up a wealth of new employment possibilities for workers who previously may have considered the proximity of your office to their residence as an attraction.

STRATEGIES FOR EMPLOYEE RETENTION:

#1 ASK AND LISTEN

Concerns over safety

#2 DEMONSTRATE COMPASSION AND WILLINGNESS TO HELP

Slowly but surely many companies are bringing employees back to a physical workplace. Some staff members may not welcome this development out of fear of catching the virus there or on their public transportation commute. Others may dislike the complex safety procedures instituted. In both cases, finding a job that consistently provides remote options may become a priority.

#3 SHARE WHAT YOU CAN

Stress from full-time work

Undoubtedly, the pandemic changed daily life for most people. Individuals juggling work obligations with activities such as assisting children with e-learning or overseeing the needs of a homebound elderly parent may come to the conclusion that something has to give. If financially able, leaving the workforce entirely or finding a part-time position saves sanity.

Workload problems

Staff cuts due to the pandemic leave existing employees taking on more responsibility. This increased amount on their plate is largely the reason that more than a third of workers say they are [more burned out on the job today](#) compared to a year ago. Working in overdrive takes a toll and can lead to seeking a more manageable environment.

On the flipside, some workers struggle with boredom. Without as much to do at some firms, employers may be assigning more busywork and trainings - leading workers to search for something with greater mental stimulation.

Strategies for employee retention

While a feasible resolution may not exist for every issue, employers need to thoughtfully consider what actions are within their power. The odds of employees staying increase when they feel heard and valued.

Ask and listen

Through surveys, group meetings, and one-on-one sessions, learn about what's going on in the lives of your employees both in terms of work and general well-being. This knowledge can assist in everything from pinpointing who is shouldering too much of the workload to what safety concerns are keeping people up at night.

Solicit suggestions, and provide multiple outlets for responding. Perhaps someone has a specific idea for a training he'd find truly useful for his position. Another person may have interesting thoughts on how the company could better assist struggling parents. Employees engaged in bettering both their own career and the overall operation of the company develop bonds that encourage retention.

Demonstrate compassion and willingness to help

With many people struggling with stress, depression, financial insecurity, and other issues, throwing whatever lifeboats you can get remembered.

"Today's business environment is all about flexibility," says Dave Hoch, CEO of [Colibrily](#), a holistic web design and development firm. "We have had to adjust our employee policies around flex time and the need for employees to take time off to care for loved ones. We decided to make a complete 'honor' system on flex time with our staff. If they need time off, they get it. This has led us to retain more of our staff than if we took a more rigid work schedule policy."

Jennifer Barnes, CEO of [Optima Office](#), says that throughout the pandemic her company found ways to increase its already high retention rate by making sure the team was well taken care of.

"We sent a couple care packages to their homes with meals for their family and company swag items," Barnes says. "We started with weekly Zoom meetings from March to July then moved to monthly meetings with break-out rooms and fun activities to keep people motivated. We have found ways to give added flexibility to our team, help them with their added technology needs, and even gave a stimulus check to cover the work-from-home added costs of our team. Going above and beyond for our team not only added to their loyalty, but it added to their overall well-being."

Share what you can

Lastly, remember that trust always remains a key component in employee retention. You may not possess all the answers during these uncertain times, but your honesty about where things stand strengthens relationships.

"Our employee retention strategy has been to focus on consistent communication and transparency," says Ian Kelly, vice president of operations at [NuLeaf Naturals](#). "I think where a lot of companies are going wrong and losing employees is that they are holding their cards too close to their chest, allowing uncertainty and rumors and anxiety to thrive. A rumor about job cuts can sometimes do more damage than an actual cut. We avoid the rumor mill by keeping everyone informed as we learn new information, and being transparent when things seem to contradict previous information. Truthfully, these are unprecedented circumstances, so there will be some backtracking and corrections to make along the way."

Work on creating a "we're all in this together" mentality now, and you'll increase the odds that your valuable talent will still be around to enjoy the better times ahead together!