KEEPING TALENT – ALIGNING LEADERSHIP MINDSETS TO RETAIN TALENT

By Debbie Craig & John Gatherer

Keeping talent takes the concept of a "great place to work" and the 5 GREATS to a practical level of application including the annual talent review process to keep track of your talent pools, emerging stars, manage underperformers and to address barriers and opportunities to attract and retain talent.

Introduction

Talent retention is the single most critical area of Talent Management and the area where the effort is well worth the reward. Ironically, the effectiveness of your employee retention is also the best indicator of how well your talent management strategy is working!

So much has been written about talent retention. Publications are riddled with practical advice and wisdom to help struggling organisations combat high attrition rates in times of great uncertainty and skills shortages. There are also numerous research studies demonstrating the business case for investing in employee retention. If you Google the subject you will find a plethora of articles lamenting a variety of approaches on retention - 10 ways to keep your best skills, 7 ways to improve talent retention, top tips to address employee turnover, using humour to retain employees, the power of positive recognition…..the list is endless.

We hope to be able to share with you, some practical advice and tips that work in the real world for keeping talent (even in tough times) and help you in time with having an answer the following questions?

- How attractive are you as an employer to new and current employees?

- Do your employees know exactly what is expected from them?

- How well is your corporate culture expressed in the workplace?

- What is the tenor and style of leadership

- How do you recognise and incentivise your employees?

Employee Turn on's and Turn off's

A critical issue with today's talented individuals, is choosing what kind of organisation they want to work for. Steve Drotter, who co-authored the book "The Leadership Pipeline" says that **"every employee is entitled to a good boss and a good job!"** There are many factors influencing employee performance and satisfaction in an organisation: the environment, organisational culture, leadership, team dynamics and the individual's own skills and attitudes. It is a challenging mix of factors to cope with. Individuals will have a far better chance of success to truly optimize their potential and compete effectively with skills and talent from around the world if they are working in an organization that promotes the **"great place to work"** mind-set.

We have often engaged client companies in an interesting exercise by asking young high potentials or leadership groups to list what their "turn on's" and "turn off's" are. It's a gap analysis with an insightful collective view of areas creating irritation, frustration, dysfunction as well as features of positivity, credibility and accomplishment.

The following is an excerpt from an international chemical company, and typifies the usual responses in recent years:

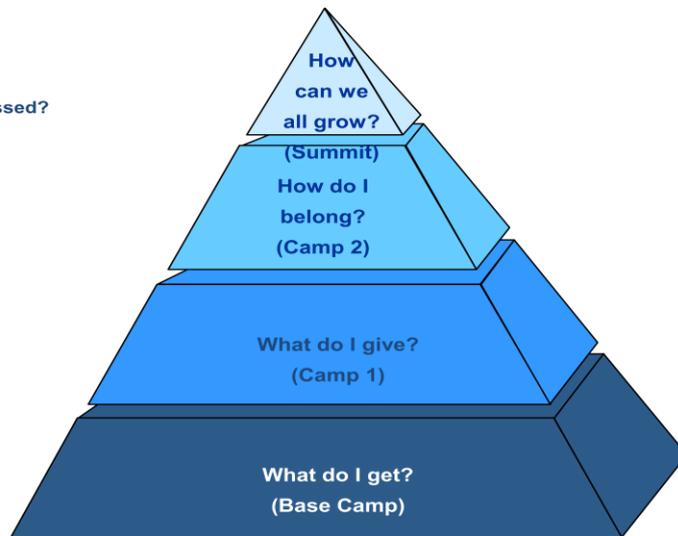| Turn On's	Turn Off's
Freedom of actions and thinking	Old ways, past practice, insularity
Great working environment – caring environment	Entitlement and expectations
Like seeing people develop	Pettiness, hypocrisy, politics
Like impossible challenges and finding solutions	Groups of people who don't understand the political realities in the country
Competent leadership – a lot to learn from the top	Inconsistencies in way people were treated - inequalities of benefits
Opportunity to grow and learn	
Attractive remuneration/financial package	Resistance to change
Right size – broad involvement	Plans of actions being changed without consultation and justification
New challenges/variety every day	
Young organization with high growth	Lack of honesty and truthfulness
Colleagues - fantastic team	Too much hands on by management on operational issues
Feeling that one can have direct impact on the company's performance	Not everyone has the same application and commitment to their jobs
Good working relationships/happy environment	
Growth and development opportunities	Lack of real empowerment
Sense of pride in the work and the company	Interference
Feel energized and motivated	Lack of responsiveness and respect for peoples time
Opportunities to take local expertise internationally	Ego's of people
Staying at forefront of innovation and creativity	Hidden bureaucracy
Being part of a global organization where you are respected as a team player	Process slowed down by impact of involving others
	Work-life balance – family life suffering
	Non team players
	Inconsistencies of approach regarding people

Engagement Research

The Gallup Organisation has been leading the way with employee engagement, since their ground-breaking study in 1998 in which they established a critical relationship between employee attitudes and critical business outcomes. Measures in this study included revenue, profitability, customer loyalty and retention. The study was based on more than 100,000 employees from 2,500 business units in 12 industries identified these attitudes as paramount in managing and improving the workplace:

- Opportunities to learn and grow in the last year
- In last six months has my progress been discussed?

- At work, my opinions seem to count
- I have a best friend at work
- Co-workers committed to quality
- Mission/purpose of company

- Do what I do best every day
- Someone at work encourages my development
- Supervisor/someone at work cares
- Recognition in last seven days

- Do I have materials and equipment I need to do my work correctly?
- Do I know what is expected of me at work

How can we all grow?
(Summit)

How do I belong?
(Camp 2)

What do I give?
(Camp 1)

What do I get?
(Base Camp)

The Gallup Engagement Hierarchy

The findings showed that engaged employees (only 29%) are more productive, profitable, safer, create stronger customer relationships and stay longer with their company than less engaged employees. 56% of the workforce were not engaged and 15% were actively disengaged, working against the company's goals.

They found that people want to be involved, feel that they are contributing to the team goals, function in an efficient work environment, receive positive support and encouragement, find personal meaning and motivation in their work and feel valued for it.

These alarming disengagement statistics were later confirmed by independent international studies through leading talent management consultancies including Corporate Executive Board, Dimension Data International and Towers Perrin. Gallup found that in the US, 22 million employees were actively disengaged at a cost of $359 billion per year in lost productivity, absence, illness etc. The U.K. cost was $65 Billion a year and a study from Japan with only 9% of employees being highly engaged, found that lost productivity estimated to be $232 Billion per year.

Retention – the Big Five Greats

Talent retention is not just ensuring that that employees are "happy" and have the right skills to perform their jobs. It is about aligning values of individuals and companies for a long-term match. The "Great Companies to Work For" communicate a value proposition to attract and retain potential and actual employees. This typically covers all the aspects of a GREAT company including **"great company, great roles, great leaders, great rewards and a great culture"**.

The creation of the value proposition requires accountability at all levels, infusing the right behaviours and leadership style, instilling a talent mind-set, rewarding talent financially and recognising talent through various non-financial means such as mentoring, job rotation, role challenge, work life balance and recognition schemes.

What are the major retention guidelines?

Great company
Build an attractive employee value proposition that reflects a "great company, great roles, great leaders, great rewards and a great culture". This can be used in internal and external communication to the job market to build the reputation as a great employer. Treat people that leave the organisation well as they may be future employees or could be useful 'ambassadors' for the company brand out in the market place. If exits are poorly managed, the threat of reputational risk increases.

Great culture
Develop a conducive environment for learning and growth. Ensure the culture is crafted, managed and encouraged through effective accountability, performance management and teamwork

Great jobs
Ensure roles are interesting, challenging, flexible with sufficient depth and breadth of experience. Where required, create space by creating new roles or offering voluntary separation packages to ensure young talent is not stifled with lack of movement and opportunity

Great leaders
Develop and encourage a leadership style that is appropriate to the organisation and the culture and ensure sufficient engagement, coaching and growing people. Ensure a talent mind-set at all levels.

Great rewards
Ensure an equitable reward system that motivates and recognises and differentiates rewards for superior performance and value. Money is not the dominant motivator, but can be a factor in the decision to stay.

Ensure a well-designed recognition scheme that combines senior level exposure with creative non-financial rewards such as access to coaching or mentoring, career mobility, development programs

and assignments, career path discussions, job rotation, stretch assignments, 360 degree assessments and feedback, flexible work arrangements, family support and perks e.g. travel.

Process

On an annual basis, managers must review and rate the performance objectives that are linked to incentives and ensure reward equity and identify and manage any possible retention issues. During career discussions it is important to assess motivation and retention issues with questions such as:

- Why did you leave your last role?

- Why did you choose to work for us?

- What is the number one expectation you had when you came to work for us that has not been met?

- What keeps you at this company?

- What is the one thing that makes you think about leaving this company?

- What would lure you away to another organisation?

In principle, if someone from the talent pool resigns, it is good management practice to try and retain them. Help them analyse the real reasons for their decision and, where reasonable, try to find a creative way to accommodate them and influence their decision to stay. This should be done in accordance with each line manager's defined accountability and influence, and must clearly align with organisational requirements.

The information elicited during the release process provides valuable input back into strategic planning and recruitment. Release of talented individuals is facilitated by HR, but line managers must alert HR immediately of termination of employment of a talented individual and communicate identified reasons for leaving. Line managers must also be receptive to receiving feedback from HR, in the event of critical trends emanating from exit interviews.

When you are building the value proposition, ensure you address and communicate your ability to deliver on the 5 GREATS.

Rate your company on the whether they offer and deliver on the following:

Greats	Offerings	Rating
Great company	Reputation as a great place to work Trusted and attractive corporate brand and image Reliable and financially sound Growing and expanding with national and international exposure Commitment to community and environment Lifestyle facilities i.e. modern offices, dress-codes, coffee shop, gyms, canteens, meeting rooms, social events, sports facilities and events, etc.	
Great culture	Talent management culture and mind-set Conducive environment for interacting, learning and having fun Values that are lived, measured and encouraged Great place to work values i.e. Pride, camaraderie, respect, fairness, credibility High performance team ethic and team spirit	
Great careers	Interesting, challenging and flexible jobs – depth & breadth Structured learning, development and deployment plans Qualifications, in-house bursary schemes, graduate programs, apprenticeships, learnerships On-the-job learning through job rotation, stretch assignments, project work, secondments Coaching, mentoring, assessments and feedback Variety of career paths, career development discussions and plans Talent mobility through shadow roles, unique roles or voluntary separation packages to make space. Talent migration through national and international opportunities	
Great leaders	Defined leadership style and competencies which are trained and measured Variety of leadership development programs Assessment and feedback to leaders with coaching Leaders that engage, coach and develop others Leaders that inspire and transform the organisation and themselves Leaders that balance professional will and drive for results with humility Poor leadership style and behaviour is addressed	
Great rewards	Equitable reward and recognition system Motivational incentive schemes for stretch results Differentiated rewards for superior performance and value Team-based rewards and incentives to encourage teamwork Creative non-financial aspects such as flexible work arrangements, family support, time off and perks	

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

DEBBIE CRAIG

Debbie has over 18 years' experience in the field of strategy, leadership development, change management, talent management, high performance teams and organisational development. She has worked and consulted at leading local and global organisations in the private and public sector throughout Southern Africa and internationally in the UK, Australia, South East Asia, China, South America and the USA. Debbie is a skilled strategist, design architect, team builder, a powerful facilitator, change agent and executive coach. Her passion is transformation and empowerment which she facilitates through individual coaching and empowerment workshops, team-development workshops, corporate training and consulting assignments and organisation wide strategic change interventions. Debbie is the founder and Managing Director of Catalyst Consulting which she has grown into a successful consulting company with her business partner, John Gatherer.

Debbie has published a book, "I am Talent", on optimising potential and career aspirations, has written numerous articles, appeared on radio talk shows and presented at conferences.

JOHN GATHERER

John has over 38 years' experience in the fields of HR, labour relations, training and development, leadership and strategic change management, having held senior and executive positions in Anglo American plc. and the De Beers Groups. John joined Debbie Craig at Catalyst Consulting as Principal Consultant, specialising in strategic change, leadership development, talent management and executive coaching, working locally and internationally. John brings a deep and practical knowledge and expertise to his roles as facilitator, consultant and organization development specialist as well his ability to think strategically and design innovative solutions. John has managed large scale people management projects and transformation journeys in Africa, Asia, China, the UK, India, Kuwait, Australia and the USA.

John has co-authored a book, "I am Talent" with Debbie Craig, on optimising potential and career aspirations, has written numerous journal articles and contributing chapters to Management education publications and presented at conferences and workshops. John's other passions include photography and travel and he has written and published a number of photographic "coffee table" books on African Wildlife and Adventure Travel.

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