

## **RETAINING TODAY'S WORKFORCE**

**RETENTION** of today's young professional was the focus of the April 2000 issue of the Training and Development magazine published by the American Society for Training and Development (ASTD). The magazine was replete with lessons learned, successful orientation programs and learning technologies for retaining today's professional. What are the instructions, based on lessons learned in industries both similar and dissimilar to our own, that we may heed to stem the flow of turnover amongst our professional social workers in the field of child welfare? Whether a private for-profit or a publicly funded organization, the recommendations that follow are well worth attention and consideration.

### **CREATING THE WORK CULTURE**

As an organization, administrators must challenge themselves by asking "what kind of culture do we want to create for ourselves? Give your agency one point for every yes as you ask yourself the following:

- a. Is your agency is down to earth?
- b. Is your agency informal in its approach to people both inside and outside the organization?
- c. Are you a friendly, welcoming organization?
- d. Can your organization's culture be described as open for intelligent, hard working professionals?
- e. Do you relentlessly communicate all kinds of information to all levels of staff, all of the time, sharing goals, progress, details, planning?
- f. Do you welcome and take seriously new ideas?
- g. Is there an opportunity for matrixing - providing staff with opportunities to play multiple roles and have varied responsibilities within the organization?
- h. Is your organization one that is considered fun to work in?
- i. Do you arrange for agency barbeques and social opportunities throughout the year?
- j. Does the agency always find ways to collectively celebrate our small wins and successes?

If you hit all 10 - you probably do NOT have significant retention problems in your shop. But, suppose you did pretty well, say an six out of ten. Then, describe how you have and what you do to achieve the score you did and conduct a reality check with staff. Ask yourselves what you can do differently to net a ten in the coming months.

"The truth of the matter is just throwing money at people is not going to keep them. If an individual does not like the company, the people they work with or the way they are treated, they'll leave. The organizational culture has more to do with retaining people than its given credit."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kim Fisher: CEO, AudioBasket.com

**MAINTAINING THE WORK CULTURE**

So, how can the agency do a better job retaining professionals in a field that has historically under paid and over worked its staff? In addition to paying close attention to the ten items listed above, here are some hints from some of the country's leading and successful CEOs:

1. Develop business literate staff - educating staff on whole organization and how we do what we do, not just on their specific job.
2. Share information - have honest communication in all directions. Use 2 way communication rather than top-down communication.
3. Develop a cadre of supervisors who invite people into all facets of the work and help them see the organizational value of their contributions.
4. Create a work environment that encourages experimentation and learning.
5. Post meeting schedules of daily and weekly meetings throughout the building making them open to any staff who might have the time to join the meetings which they have an interest in (radical huh?).
6. Encourage staff to shadow anyone in the organization they want to give them a different perspective on the agency and business (including shadowing the executive director).
7. Be approachable - everyone should feel comfortable having contact with one another throughout the agency.
8. Systematically structure opportunities for staff to make the connection between the work and the objectives of the agency, doing so assists employees in seeing they are making a meaningful contribution and this is key to motivating change.
9. Seek the ideas of staff and use them. When the idea cannot be acted upon, always tell the individual or group the reason.
10. Increasing employee job satisfaction is tantamount to building positive attitudes and this results in more satisfied clients and more committed employees.
11. Use merit pay for effective performance. Other child welfare have had success with this.

"With new changes being required of staff all the time, retention-aware agencies ask themselves how the change will impact clients but also how their actions will impact the partnerships they have cultivated with staff. These agencies are willing to find ways to attend to the needs of their clients while finding ways to preserve the partnerships with staff." <sup>2</sup> There are no new tricks. The act of engaging and enabling the hearts and minds of people to help build successful organizations may be worth far more than financial incentives, better benefit packages, and morale-boosting programs." <sup>3</sup> ■

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<sup>2</sup> Logan, Jill Klobucar; Retention Tangibles; ASTD, April 2000; page 48-50.

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