

MOHEG Student Essay Award
Recruitment and Retention Strategy
Jennifer Lawmaster
Missouri State University, MHA Program, Graduate: May 2018
Email: Jennifer.Lawmaster@Mercy.net Phone: 417-825-4958
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The shortage of healthcare workers is not new and is not going anywhere. In one of the most physically and emotionally demanding professions recruiting and retaining coworkers is a never ending battle. Many think of recruitment and retention as two separate initiatives. However when broken down into their parts, they mirror the same concepts. Happy coworkers will stay and will attract other happy coworkers. Once we accept that this recruitment and retention are in fact one effort we can create many efficiencies. With the financial volatility of the current healthcare market some organizations are unable to pay as much as their competitors, sometimes significantly less. Luckily for them, dollars are not the only thing that guides a coworker's decision on where to work (Fried and Fottler, 2015).

So what then, besides money will make a coworker want to work for your organization? Much research has been done in this area and a commonly mentioned variable is leadership and management. Particularly, a coworker's direct leader can completely sway a coworker's opinion of an organization regardless of the organization's integrity (Fernandez-Araoz, 2014). Managers need to learn their coworkers, their strengths, weaknesses, and values. Each of these pieces of information presents a unique opportunity to make the coworker feel special but also adapt their circumstances to help them grow and thrive. Martin & Schmidt (2010) recommend that a good place for any leader to start when working on retention is by asking coworkers "What would make you take another job tomorrow?". As leaders we must take these answers seriously and be prepared to act on them when able.

Another study performed by Nohria, Groysberg, and Lee (2008) suggest that in order to be satisfied and motivated humans have four natural drivers. Let's look at each one individually and discuss what strategies might fall into each category. The first driver is to acquire. Humans have the natural tendency to want more; more things, more recognition, more reputation, more experiences, etc. This desire again provides managers with multiple opportunities to capitalize on this. The simplest method is to offer them more things. Offering coworkers overtime if they want it; in order to increase pay and afford more things may be effective on a short term basis; but if the organization is in a financial crunch may not be recommended. More recognition; multiple sources including Fried and Fottler (2015), Fernandez-Araoz (2014), and Martin & Schmidt (2010) all cite recognition by leaders and peers to be a key satisfier. Martin and Schmidt give examples such as; running banner ads celebrating successes or naming a companywide initiative after coworkers. Senior leadership recognition is also important and it is strategic for executives to make a distinct effort to meet with coworkers. More reputation is also an option, though this one is of larger scale. Coworkers want to work in a place they are proud of, thus public opinion of your facility is important to coworker satisfaction as well.

The second intrinsic motivator mentioned by Nohria et al (2008) was the desire to bond. They report that the drive to bond can have the most significant effect on employee commitment to an organization. Fried and Fottler describe this as a culture of teamwork or sense of belonging (2015). It is very difficult to leave an organization when you feel you will be abandoning your friends and family. They also mention that a culture of teamwork not only improves coworker morale, but then transfers over into patient satisfaction scores. Patients can feel if their care team is actually a team.

Third is the human drive to comprehend. Again, all of the above cited references refer to this drive in one way or another. Fried and Fottler report that coworkers desire opportunities for growth in their field. They also report the desire of coworkers to have jobs that are challenging and provide a sense of responsibility. Things like offering a skilled coworker the opportunity to head a quality improvement project, complete the unit schedule, or take a course that will improve a skill are all reasonably low cost options to trigger this motivator. In addition Fernandez-Araoz (2014) discusses a coworker's need to feel a sense of purpose and to serve something larger than themselves. Being in the healthcare field alone may quench this desire, but another option may be to coordinate some community outreach projects. Have your team go feed the homeless one day or participate in a charity based 5K. These things will not only drive a sense of purpose but will also drive the need to bond.

The final motivator listed is to defend. Coworkers dislike things that would engage this motivator and will avoid them. Things like internally inequitable pay, unfair promotions, favoritism, or the feeling of an unsafe culture can quickly squelch motivation. Managers should take care to eliminate potential threats to coworkers. Some things, such as compensation perhaps are out of the control of the manager. Maybe even out of the control of the organization; such as state regulations, CMS practices, reimbursement, etc. These topics should be candidly addressed, not skirted around. Trust is key to any successful relationship. Be honest with your coworkers about such issues. Nohria et al and others say that any of these things on their own will not create a successful retention strategy, but collaboratively they are more valuable than the sum of their parts, and benefits are exponential.

References

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