New Rules for Attracting and Retaining Government Talent

Government leaders must partner with employees to help them develop their careers in ways that also support the agency's mission, especially in a tight job market that gives employees plenty of options.

Finding, attracting and retaining talent is a top challenge facing government agencies. Emily Craig, partner for IBM Talent and Transformation, recently shared strategies that government agencies can use to find and cultivate the workforce they need now and prepare for the future.

Focus on the skills, not the job. Today's employees aren't looking for a career built on predictable intervals and promotions. They want a series of growth experiences where they can learn new skills, progress at their own pace and be recognized for their contributions.

That means government leaders must partner with employees to help them develop their careers in ways that also support the agency's mission, especially in a job market that gives employees plenty of options.

"Today, talent is in the driver's seat," says Craig. "If your workers can't put together the kinds of growth experiences they're looking for, they're going to go find them elsewhere."

To attract and retain these workers, agencies should foster a culture of continuous education. Instead of pulling employees into occasional formal training sessions, skills development must be delivered on demand through tools such as online learning portals that let workers acquire new capabilities as needed. These resources also need to include multiple learning options.

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> *— Emily Craig, Partner, IBM Talent and Transformation*

"Organizations should recognize that people want to learn in different ways," says Craig. "A learning portal should contain a variety of resources — videos, written material, simulations, etc. — so employees can use the tools that work best for them."

Create a great employee experience. According to Gartner, compensation is a leading factor for attracting talent — but it's not the only factor. Work-life balance and making a real difference in your community also can be powerful motivators. Agencies need to leverage these non-monetary strengths.

"You have a unique mission, a unique culture and a unique proposition for people who want to work at your agency," says Craig. "The employee experience is about how you bring that to life in everything your employees do over the course of their workday."

Craig says these tactics can help agency leaders improve the employee experience:

- **Find opportunities for personalization:** For example, when you roll out new employee-facing technology, can you make the new application recognize users and their preferences? Small efforts can help make employees feel closer to an organization.

- **Be inclusive and responsive:** When you're deploying new technologies or processes, make employees part of the experience by soliciting their ideas and feedback, and then either act on their input or explain to them why you aren't.

- **Be transparent:** Explain your decision-making criteria to employees and help them understand how workplace decisions may impact them. "I've discovered that when I'm willing to put myself out there and provide employees a level of insight into what I'm doing or thinking as a leader — even if employees don't like what I have to say — it builds trust," says Craig.

- **Keep it simple.** When bringing change into the work environment, strive to make the experience as straightforward as possible.

Leverage artificial intelligence. Successful employers increasingly will use artificial intelligence (AI) to assess and manage talent.

"AI combined with natural language processing and quantitative data can provide HR leaders with a list of the most qualified candidates almost instantly," says Craig. "That accelerates the effectiveness of HR specialists. And think about the benefits to the manager hiring into that position. Using AI we can find the best qualified candidates faster and get them into jobs quicker."

AI can also help agencies retain talent. For example, it can identify which employees have the skills most critical to the future of the organization and provide predictions on how likely those key employees are to leave the organization. Eventually, leaders might take that one step further and use AI to create recommendations for retaining those crucial employees.

"Maybe a contributing factor is a long commute," says Craig. "You could offer that employee an extra telecommute day. Or, if you can't give them a cash bonus, you could offer them extra time off."

Encourage career mobility. Great employees can be hard to find and even harder to let go. But encouraging career mobility and allowing employees to move into different roles within the organization ultimately can help agencies attract more talent.

"You have to be willing to send talent out to accomplish great things in support of other leaders," says Craig. "Hopefully that's within your organization, but maybe that's outside it or maybe it's at another public sector agency. Ultimately, you want to be known as a leader that grows and fosters talent that goes out and does great things. That will help you attract new talent."

This session is part of the IBM Government Cloud Virtual Summit, a free, online event featuring 17 sessions with insightful keynotes, illustrative case studies and deep dives into job-critical topics for government leaders. To view any of these sessions, visit: www.govtech.com/ibmvirtualsummit