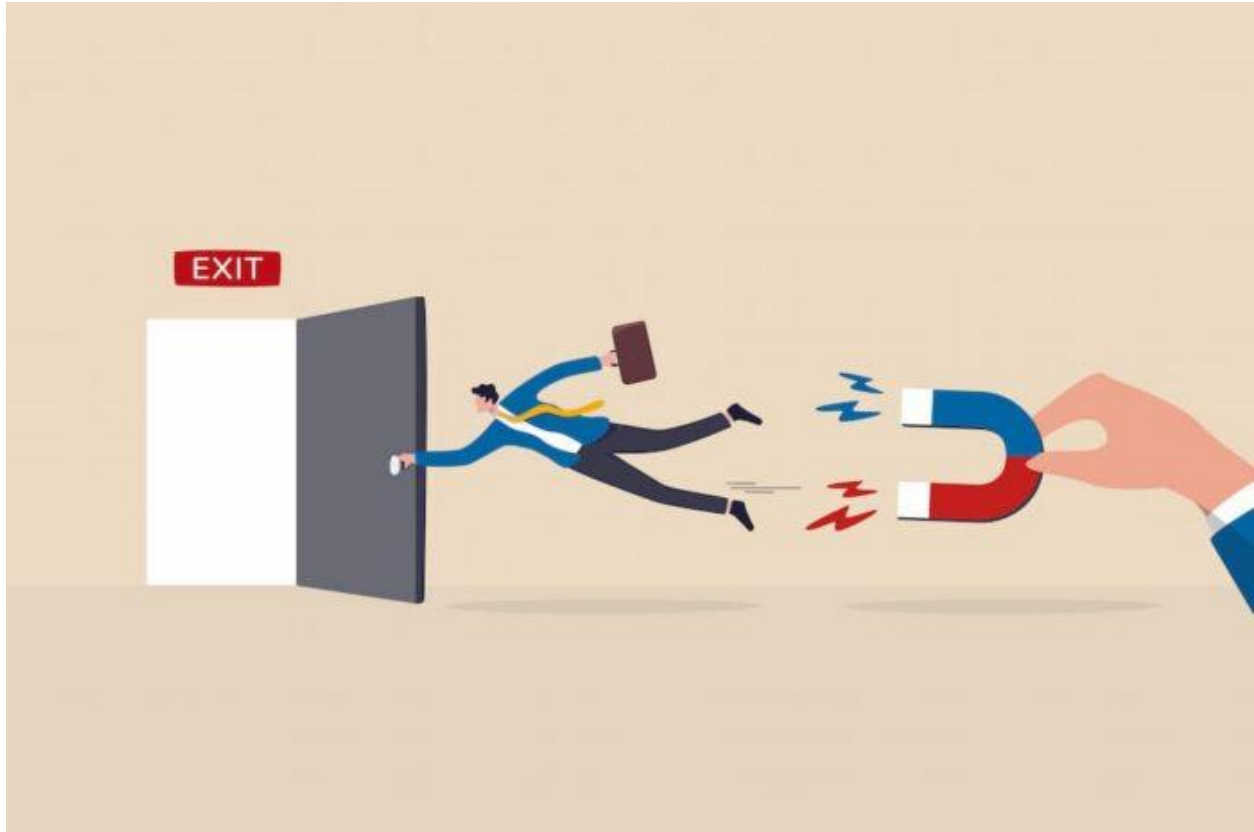


How to Build an Ownership Culture That Keeps Top Talent

HR Executive | Marissa Frois | July 16, 2026



Credit: Adobe Stock

We have officially moved past the “gold watch” era. For decades, the corporate contract was simple: Give a company your loyalty and they will reward you with a guaranteed pension and lifelong security. Today, that traditional safety net is fraying, and HR leaders are feeling the impact firsthand.

If you sit in an HR leadership role today, you are likely agonizing over retention. Most HR leaders operate under the assumption that they lose their top talent to competitors that offer a slightly higher salary or a better hybrid schedule. In reality, they more often lose them to the desire for independence and control.

Workers today look for autonomy instead of an old-fashioned boss. If your employees feel their only path to professional and financial security is to leave your organization, it is time for you to change the internal narrative.

The rise of the anti-powerless generation

The modern workforce is exhausted from high-stress environments with minimal job security. Having watched previous generations endure sudden layoffs, corporate restructuring and toxic environments, these workers no longer find the old corporate promises credible.

Data from The Entrepreneur's Source Generational Career Confidence Survey found 83% of Americans believe owning a business is a better, more reliable option than a traditional job.

Why the sudden shift? It is not just about chasing higher pay. Employees are desperately looking for control over their careers, especially as they face the looming threats of AI disruption and ageism. They seek a new standard of career security defined by what we call I.L.W.E.[™]: Income, Lifestyle, Wealth and Equity.

To retain this innovative talent, organizations must pivot from managing tasks to empowering builders. You must bridge the gap by offering intrapreneurship, allowing your talent to act like owners within the safety of your company walls.

Here are four practical strategies HR leaders can implement today to help employees feel like true owners of their work.

1. Grant decision rights over budgets and tools

Remote work and flexible hours are now baseline expectations instead of unique perks. To truly foster an ownership mindset, you must move beyond schedule flexibility and grant actual decision rights.

Stop micromanaging workflows and start handing over the keys. When you give employees a genuine say over their own budgets, technology stacks and operational tools, you provide the exact type of freedom they usually leave the corporate world to find.

By allowing them to choose how they accomplish their goals and manage their resources, you signal trust. You also empower them to operate their division as if it were their own small business, increasing their emotional investment in the outcomes.

2. Ditch strict job descriptions for project ownership

Top-performing employees feel stifled when forced into rigid job descriptions that limit their potential. To scratch their entrepreneurial itch internally, have them transition away from static roles and move toward dynamic project ownership.

You can also create "mini-business" units within your organization. Assign a specific project or initiative to a small team and give them the autonomy to run it from start to finish.

It's also crucial to provide them with a transparent personal scoreboard. When high-performers can clearly see how their direct effort moves the needle on company revenue and success, their motivation shifts from simply getting through the workday to actively growing their piece of the pie.

3. Build a skill moat through AI training

According to the same survey, 61% of workers fear AI disruption. Many view business ownership as a shield against this technological shift because it puts them in the driver's seat of their own future.

HR leaders can provide the same level of career insurance by reframing how their organization handles AI. Instead of allowing it to be a source of anxiety, position internal AI training as an asset. Offer resources to help employees build a skill moat of transferable, advanced skills that keep them safe and relevant in any economy.

Show your team that staying with your company is the fastest, most supported way to master the technology that will future-proof their entire career. After all, AI itself is not necessarily going to replace people—it ultimately will be the people who know how to use AI.

4. Treat departing entrepreneurs as partners, not lost talent

Even with the best intrapreneurship programs, some of your top talent will eventually leave to start their own businesses. Historically, HR and management have viewed these departures as a total loss—or worse, a betrayal. It is time to fundamentally rewrite this narrative.

When people leave to start a business, celebrate them. Treat them as partners rather than lost talent. Maintaining a supportive, encouraging relationship with entrepreneurial alumni creates a strategic long-term strategy for your organization. These individuals can become your most passionate brand advocates, future vendors or even boomerang employees who return years later with newly acquired executive skills.

When your current staff sees how gracefully and supportively you treat those who pursue career ownership, it builds trust within your active ranks.

Ready to redesign the employee experience?

The biggest risk your employees feel they take today is staying entirely dependent on someone else's decisions. If you want to retain your best people, it is time to stop acting like an employer and start acting like a partner in their career growth.

By offering autonomy, project ownership, skill security and lifelong support, you empower your team to take control of their paths while company growth.