

Retain and Gain

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“Employees need to have a broader understanding of their own career, while Owners and Managers need to motivate, challenge and support employees as they grow. How these needs are identified, met and measured in large part defines the culture of your company.”

- *Retain and Gain*, page 14

Retain and Gain: Career Management for Small Businesses by Lisa Taylor is a practical, hands-on manual for organizations and managers seeking strategies to keep their employees engaged and excited in their work through better career management. Career management is a tricky subject for many managers, as it requires open conversations about the long term goals of employees, which may not be related to the organization. As a result, many people simply ignore this crucial component of engaging with their teams. It's hard to hear that your exciting new hire has a long-term plan to work in a different industry, or achieve a level of success that won't be available to them via your organization. It's even harder to create a culture where employees feel comfortable sharing those goals without being worried about being penalized for them. *Retain and Gain* offers highly actionable tactics to help managers and organizations develop a career management strategy that will result in a more engaged workforce. Laid out as a travel guide, and spanning a slim 60 pages, this book is a perfect companion for even the most time starved managers.

The Big Idea

Tactics that Fit Your Schedule

"But we all know that the most rewarding part of preparing for a trip occurs once the itinerary is set and the planning is done; when you know what to expect and can focus on how to make an already great schedule a terrific experience."

- *Retain and Gain*, page 20

Once you've decided to embark on a career management journey, it's time to choose your tactics. For busy managers (which, let's be honest, is almost all of them), it can be challenging to fit career management into a hectic schedule. Taylor maps out three paths, depending on how much time you have. Here are a few of my favorite ideas:

If you've got 10 minutes: Call in a team member for a chat that is not related to checking in on projects or daily updates. Talk candidly about what they are thinking about and interested in, both personally and professionally. This is an opportunity to establish candor, and learn a bit more about your team. The more you know about the people working with you, the better you will be able to support their long-term goals for their careers.

If you've got an hour: Share an article or tool that focuses on soft skills that will help your team achieve their goals. You could also share a TedTalk or other online video, or a podcast episode. Spend an hour chatting with your team about how they can apply those principles to their work, or to their long-term goals. Encourage team members to share their knowledge and skills with each other.

If you've got a half day: Create a detailed plan for how you will support your team moving forward. While financial incentives are powerful motivators, there are many other opportunities that you can provide that will help them develop their skills, boost their credibility, and contribute to the team in new ways. Attending an industry conference, going on a trip, being publicly recognized for their work, or being given opportunities to work on challenging new projects are all highly motivating tactics to keep employees engaged and progressing toward their goals.

Insight #1

Stop Trying to Provide Stairs

"10 years ago [careers were like] stairs, but now people can have so many careers it's hard to say but a trip or a journey best describes it."

- *Retain and Gain*, page 16

The landscape of work has shifted dramatically in recent years—there is no longer an expectation for employees to work their way up through an organization in a linear fashion. Of course, employees want to be compensated fairly, and they want to feel a sense of progression in their careers, but it's not as simple as a straight line up.

More and more, people are seeking work that has meaning, that makes them feel engaged and challenged, and that encourages them to contribute to something greater than themselves. Having a clear career management strategy will help you retain staff—people will no longer feel that they need a new position to be challenged or valued.

One great way to do this is allow staff to move between departments. Ask a member of the marketing team to sit in on a sales meeting. Ask your financial controller with a writing hobby to look over new copy. Not only is asking for input an easy way to make people feel heard and valued, it can also strengthen your results by taking into account new perspectives.

Insight #2

Recognize that Employees are People

"Employee engagement is a way to express how invested your staff are, personally, in the success of the business. We assert that there is nothing more personal than each employee's individual career. More than one-off rewards or team-building exercises, focusing on your team's careers ensures that your business will succeed because they've succeeded."

- *Retain and Gain*, page 7

Business owners and team leaders are rightly focused on deliverables—there's a lot to manage in the day-to-day hustle. However, to nurture engaged employees, you also need to recognize your team members as humans, who have more going on in their lives than you are aware of. Taylor offers some great insight into how to handle career management for organizations that have lost staff, are worried about succession planning, and for staff dealing with large life events that require leaves of absence.

The key to managing these circumstances is to have regular, candid conversations with your team about what's going on in their lives and how you can support them. Having an ill parent is difficult enough—adding in an employer or manager who is unsympathetic can be unbearable. Recognizing that your teams are people, with complex struggles and desires, is a great first step to creating engaged and loyal employees. Supporting a team member through a personal crisis isn't just the decent thing to do—it's a sound investment that will help you retain top performers (to include a personal example, a former manager once told me that the death of my grandmother was "really bad timing for her." I can say with certainty that I was less engaged, and less loyal after that). Be supportive and understanding of difficult circumstances—your employees are sure to appreciate it.

Career management is often perceived as difficult for business owners and managers, but it doesn't have to be. Furthermore, it's a sound investment that can help keep employees engaged—which moves the needle on just about any business metric you care to measure. For career management to be effective, organizations need to establish a culture that values candor, transparency, and frequent conversations. If your team doesn't feel safe sharing their long term goals and personal interests, you will struggle to make progress. *Retain and Gain* will arm you with the tools you need to embark on your career management journey.

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