

# Holding Onto the Stars

Talent retention has become increasingly more vital. Do you know the best ways to keep the grass greener on your side of the fence? **BY SARAH LEVITT**

“They’re leaving for a granola bar,” a CEO recently told me, frustrated with retention and other companies that seemed to lure employees away.

“They’re not,” I replied.

For faster opportunities to advance? Yes. For more money? Absolutely. For greater and continued assurance of autonomy? Yep. But not for a granola bar. That points to something else.

The talent market that we find ourselves in has been brewing for more than two years. For all of 2021, as business momentum picked up in most sectors, I talked with clients about getting out in front and crafting a proactive talent-retention strategy.

Here are six of my current recommendations for how you can be more competitive in attracting and retaining top talent:

**Preserve autonomy.** People have gotten a taste of autonomy, and it will not be forgotten anytime soon. For the last two years, many employees have had the opportunity to decide how they want to integrate their lives and their work. They’re doing laundry while attending Zoom meetings; they’re taking a sick child to the doctor and working later that evening. There’s a lot of talk about employee flexibility, but it’s the freedom to decide for oneself that’s more at issue. So the question for leaders is: where can you provide as much autonomy as possible?

**Create belonging.** This is all about creating a sense of place and connection that helps to give our lives meaning and tells us that we’re a part of something – that we matter. Communicating this to your team members is a crucial part of what I call strategic leadership. One of the most effective methods for that communication is a twice-monthly email bulletin to your team that shares vision, context (including the challenges), progress and successes. Be sure to emphasize the contributions of team members to your company’s overarching mission.

**Survey your people.** To get a pulse on where team members need autonomy and where they really yearn to be part of connectedness again, you have to ask. Then you can craft a responsive strategy. Rigid return-to-office policies are simply not effective. The question to ask and answer is: how can you draw your people in rather than push them out?



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**Provide inspiration.** Rather than being squishy, clients are finding that inspiration is a bedrock for keeping talent, meeting deadlines and driving business results. If you have leaders in your organization that employees want to follow, you’ll have greater productivity and a leg up on your competition. This is not time for lackluster leadership; employees simply have too much choice. Be sure that your leaders have the support and development they need, and you’ll better ensure that you hang onto your talent.

**Conduct Stay Interviews.** Like the surveys mentioned above, these pinpoint

what’s really going on among team members and are a key tool for talent retention and attraction. They provide insight into why your best employees, your superstars, are sticking around. And that proves to be invaluable when recruiting, because you’re able to speak a language that matters to potential employees.

**Have meaningful career-path conversations.** Leaders need to engage in meaningful discussions with their team members about their interests, ambitions and curiosities. Such conversations can no longer be left for annual reviews alone. This helps create better paths and opportunities. The allure of going to another employer is often rooted in the perception of greater opportunity to enhance one’s experience. Faster.

Lastly, if you do lose someone to a competitor and you’d welcome their return, consider the following:

- Get their truest take on why they’re leaving; make it easy for them to tell you.
- Don’t burn the bridge; wish them well.
- Stay in touch after they leave.
- Let them know about any new projects and exciting work that the organization is doing that might be of interest to them, specifically.
- Have a really good sense of what’s important to them in the big picture, such as family, or ways they find meaning in their work.
- Keep them apprised of new initiatives at your company that are in alignment with that big picture.

The talent market won’t always be this way. But there are leaders and organizations using it to get better.

And they will.



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