

Keeping Excellent Staff

By Jeanne Supin

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Losing, recruiting, and retaining excellent staff is one of the most challenging problems facing community behavioral healthcare leaders. It affects consumer and family engagement, continuity of care, service capacity, staff workload and morale, and your financial bottom line. Although turnover rates vary across the country, some centers report 30% or more annual turnover for key front-line case management positions.

Significant direct and indirect costs result from turnover. Some studies suggest that replacing an employee can cost (direct & indirect) more than three times the annual salary. The direct costs to fill a \$60,000 employee range from \$9,777 to \$49,000.

As a result, the key is to *make sure you keep excellent staff!* Jeanne Supin, MA, a National Council consultant and Terry Haru, PhD, Chief Compliance Officer, Heritage Behavioral Health Center will present a workshop intended to help you do just that. This dynamic, experiential session will offer research-based, practical advice about how you can entice great employees to stay and be successful.

Here's the Research

First, some myths must be dispelled. According to comprehensive Gallup research (Buckingham & Coffman, *First Break All the Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*, Simon & Shuster, 1999) productivity and retention *don't* depend on pay or benefits. Instead, employees stay and perform their best when they *can* do their best, when the structures, supervision, and culture of an organization truly emphasize excellence. It is the organization's culture and practices that contribute most to retention and excellent performance.

The Gallup organization created a useful questionnaire to measure staff assessment of their workplace that correlates with productivity, profit, retention, and consumer satisfaction (the Q12). Five of the twelve statements relate specifically to retention:

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- I know what is expected of me at work.
- I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right.
- I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day.
- My supervisor or someone at work seems to care about me as a person.
- At work my opinions seem to count.

Employees who can strongly agree these five statements are the employees who are excellent performers and who stay with their organizations. What's more, Buckingham & Coffman found high retention and excellent performance are further enhanced when staff have a great relationship with their direct supervisor.

Other experts find similar results and offer similar advice.

McKinsey and Company surveyed 6,900 corporate leaders from 56 companies as part of their "War for Talent 2000" study, and created "SevenTalent Imperatives" for retaining the best staff ("War for Talent II: Seven Ways to Win," *Fast Company*, January 2001):

1. Talent mindset at all levels
2. Have compelling reasons why someone wants to work for you
3. High performance culture that combines a strong performance ethic and a trusting environment
4. Recruit talent continuously
5. Develop people to their full potential
6. Make room for talent to grow
7. Focus on retaining high performers

John Izzo, PhD and Pam Withers studied issues around staff retention at 200 companies across North America. (*Values Shift: The New Work Ethic and What It Means for Business*, Wasserman Medical Publishers, 2001.) As one of North America's leading expert on the best places to work and high performance cultures, John Izzo studied 200 companies. Rather than hearing typical dissatisfaction, Izzo and Withers found that employees are asking themselves fundamental questions about their work, suggesting a profound culture shift.

Izzo and Withers suggest the following strategies as part of an overall effort to respond to this pivotal change:

1. Proactively offer ways to improve work / life balance
2. Actively promote sense of deeper cause

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- 3.Promote & support professional growth & development
- 4.Treat employees like partners
- 5.Create community in the workplace
- 6.Maintain mutual trust

(You can see John Izzo live as Sunday afternoon's keynote speaker at the NCCBH Annual Conference.)

Common Themes from the Research

Advice and research from the experts can be divided into two sets of themes: employee and organizational.

Employee Themes

Employees who perform excellent work and remain loyal to an organization have the following experiences and can answer an emphatic "Yes!" to the following questions:

1. Ability to do excellent work:
 - Am I the best fit for my job?
 - Do I know what's expected of me?
 - Do I have everything (competencies, skills, tools, resources, support) I need to perform excellent work?
 - Can I do my best every day?
 - Can I achieve the best possible results?
 - Can I grow and develop professionally?

2. Professional and personal integration and synergy:
 - Can I align my professional and personal values at work?
 - Can I take care of both my professional and personal responsibilities, goals, and desires?
 - Does someone at work care about me, professionally and personally?
 - Can I find a sense of community at work?

3. Strong relationships:

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- Do my opinions seem to count at work?
- Can I help make improvements in my own job and across the organization?
- Do I trust others in the organization?
- Do I believe the organization has a culture of honesty?
- Can I be honest and trustworthy at work?

4. Sense of meaning:

- Does my work feel meaningful and purposeful to me?
- Does my work lift my spirit and fill my soul?

Organizational Themes:

Organizations that have loyal, high performing employees emphasize these themes and top leadership can answer an emphatic “Yes!” to these questions:

1. Highest Quality:

- Do we set and strive for the highest possible quality and outcomes?
- Do we embrace and implement best practices in all we do?
- Do we live a culture of continuous quality improvement?

2. Excellent Performance:

- Do we recruit for the best talent?
- Do we ensure the best fit between employee and job?
- Are our expectations clear?
- Do we provide ongoing, meaningful feedback and valuable performance reviews?
- Do we spend the vast majority of our time, attention, and money on those who do excellent jobs?

3. Successful Infrastructure:

- Do our policies, structures, and practices support excellent work and talent?

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- Are we flexible, emphasizing individual strengths and quality outcomes?
 - Do we lavish managers and supervisors with training, guidance, mentoring, support, time, and energy toward their success?
4. Strong Relationships:
- Do we value strong, healthy, collaborative relationships throughout the organization?
 - Do our structures and practices support strong, health, collaborative relationships throughout the organization?
 - Can employees actively participate in meaningful continuous quality improvement?
 - Do we encourage honest and trustworthiness?
 - Are we -- he top leaders -- honest and trustworthy?
5. Sense of Meaning:
- Is our vision clear, meaningful, and inspiring?
 - Does everyone know, understand, support and embody our vision?
 - Can our consumers, families, and employees find meaning in what we do?

These are tough questions to ask, and tougher issues to address. However, organizations of all types, including behavioral healthcare organizations, can reduce turnover, increase productivity, and improve results by getting good, honest answers to these questions and implementing meaningful improvements as a result. These kind of changes may take time and money, but money saved through high retention can be shifted and *better spent on keeping and encouraging great employees.*