

Seven Ways to Immediately Improve Retention

By Kevin Eikenberry – Leadership Coach

Retaining top talent should always be a focus of leaders and organizations. However, during times of high employment, or an historic Great Resignation, the topic gets more attention. While there many facets to talent retention, too often individual leaders look to the organization and/or HR to find solutions that keep the best talent onboard. Yet, there is much individual leaders can do to improve talent retention.

The Leader's Role

There are many things people look for when choosing their work. Of course, they want to be compensated, but that is just the start. Too many leaders assume retention and turnover hinge solely on factors like pay, benefits, and policies that lie outside of their individual control. While all those things matter, the experience people have with their boss plays a large role in their desire to stay—or willingness to look elsewhere and leave.

The Seven Ways

What can leaders do to improve talent retention? Here are seven specific and immediately implementable ideas.

1. *Say please and thank you.* After we teach children their names, “please” and “thank you” are among the first words we want them to learn. We know these words show respect and appreciation for others. Just because you have positional power doesn't mean you must (or can) demand things. And just because “it is their job” doesn't mean we can't (or shouldn't) say thank you when they do something well. If you appreciate what people are doing, are you letting them know?
2. *Ask for opinions.* Your team members have a perspective on the work that you don't have. In many cases, they are doing work you never did. Even if they are doing your former job, if you have been the leader for any length of time, things have changed. When you ask for the opinions of others, you will show respect and appreciation to them—and arrive at better decisions.
3. *Listen.* When you ask for those opinions, then you better listen to their ideas! Asking doesn't mean you always have to implement what you hear, but asking without really listening to understand might be worse than not ever asking. Work to be a better listener in all your interactions with team members.
4. *Trust more.* One way to show your trust is by becoming a more active and effective listener. But there are plenty of ways to show your trust in your team. Here are two other examples that will show your team members you trust them—delegate more responsibilities and micromanage less.

5. *Provide feedback.* Feedback needn't be all negative and saved for the annual review or in emergency situations. Let people know how they are doing. Show them what is working and encourage them to continue. Help them see where they can make corrections and adjustments. We all want to do good work and know how we are doing. Regular feedback allows both to happen.
6. *Ask for feedback.* Who better to give you feedback on you as a leader than those you are leading? And what better way to show your trust than by asking those same people how you are doing? Asking for feedback is one of the best things you can do as a leader. It will show you want to improve, and give you input so that you can.
7. *Communicate the big picture.* People want more than a paycheck; they want to do work that makes a difference. When we as leaders help them see where the work leads, who it helps, how they are making a difference, they are less likely to leave. People find their own meaning in work, but not in a vacuum. Make sure people see how what they do matters and is making a difference.

Read this list again and ask yourself two questions:

1. Do I want to work for a leader that regularly does these things?
2. Everything else equal (or even close), would I more likely stay to continue to work for that person?

Assuming your answers are like mine, then there is just one more question ...

Where Will You Start?

There is nothing on the above list that is shocking or new. Just because they aren't new, doesn't mean they can't improve talent retention. All are things you have done and can do—starting today. Doing any of them will help; doing all of them will make a bigger positive difference than you can imagine. You will get better relationships, you will get better results, and you will improve retention of your most important asset—your people.

While all will help, you must start somewhere. Resolve to work on one of these suggestions immediately. The beauty of the list is that none require a new policy, a decision from senior management, or additional training. Pick one and start right now.

About Kevin Eikenberry



Kevin Eikenberry is a world renowned leadership expert, a two-time bestselling author, speaker, consultant, trainer, coach, leader, learner, husband, and father.

He was recently recognized by Inc.com as one of the top 100 Leadership & Management thinkers in the World.