

## RETAIN ENTRY LEVEL WORKERS

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Attracting, motivating and retaining entry-level workers can present a challenge to businesses of all sizes. The wide age range of such workers, which may include inexperienced beginners in their late teens to older workers with extensive job experience, complicates the matter. What motivates the workers varies according to their different needs and perceptions. Youthful workers, for example, may view the job as only a first step in their work life. Benefits, such as insurance, may not seem as important to them as to the older worker with a family.

Turnover is costly for all businesses, large or small. For a worker you are paying \$24,000 a year, it will cost you an additional thousand or so dollars to replace them. However, the small business owner may feel the impact more immediately and to a higher degree. While there may not be a magic formula for attracting and keeping entry-level workers, here are some tips to consider:

**Avoid the mindset that “it’s only an entry-level job” when advertising and hiring.**

If you present the job as a “nothing,” job applicants will view it the same way. It may be entry-level, but it is still important to hire the best person you can find for the job.

**Pay the highest wages that you can afford.**

Constant turnover due to low wages can quickly increase your business costs and erode any savings realized initially. If necessary, stretch the company budget to pay a little more. Low pay can be a false economy in the long term.

**Recognize and reward entry-level workers for their accomplishments.**

Again, “entry level” does not translate into “unimportant.” Take time to acknowledge the worth of entry-level employees. Avoid shallow or routine praise given simply because “that’s what the book says to do.” Employees, especially the older ones, quickly recognize this and it can do more harm than good.

**Compliment employees according to the level of their skills.**

An inexperienced employee may deserve, and appreciate, a compliment in a situation where an experienced employee would actually scoff at a compliment for something so routine. Tailor your praise (and criticism) to the person and his or her level of expertise.

**Offer cash rewards on an on-going basis.**

For someone on entry-level job wages, even small cash rewards on a regular basis can be important.

**Award “personal days” for special achievements.**

Some workers may value and appreciate time off as much as cash.

**Offer a choice of rewards.**

One employee may choose cash as a reward for achieving a goal; another employee may

choose time off instead. Allow employees to choose what is important to them.

**Be flexible.**

Consider offering flexible working hours to employees. You may find this benefits the company as well as motivates employees.

**Consider a combination of sick-vacation-personal days.**

The employee may be absent from work a certain number of days each year, whether for vacation, sick or personal. The number of days is the same—how the employee uses the days is up to him or her, no explanation required.

**Offer financial assistance for education as an incentive for entry-level workers to grow within the company.**

Consider tying the assistance to longevity with the company. An employee who uses the assistance may “pay off” the loan by remaining with the company for a pre-determined period of time.

**Have meals brought in occasionally.**

Example: On the last Friday of the month, give all employees a longer lunch break and have pizza delivered, along with beverages.

**Listen to employees, then respond.**

Just listening is not enough. If the answer to a suggestion or request is “no”, tell the employee and offer an explanation. Otherwise, employees feel that management is only pretending to listen to their concerns. This can also happen if the answer is always “no”.

**Take time to know your employees as individuals.**

An advantage for small business owners is that they often have the opportunity to know employees on a more personal level and to have a better understanding of what motivates their employees as individuals. Use that knowledge—and everyone can benefit.

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