

It Starts with You: Best Practices for Creating a Happily Engaged Staff

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More than ever, it's important for employers to recognize that the job market is very different from years past. While it's been a slow and steady progression, we are now experiencing a candidate-driven market when it comes to hiring new employees. This means that there are more job opportunities than active job seekers. Because candidates can now be more selective, they are paying more attention than ever to how employers value and treat their staff.

For employers, this means that they need to be more competitive not only in the offers they extend, but how they make candidates feel throughout the interview and recruiting process, and once they are hired. With candidates interviewing employers just as much as employers are interviewing candidates, organizations must highlight how they offer work-life balance, growth and professional development opportunities, and show how they value their staff.

We at CNP know that once you hire a great new staff member, you want to keep them. You also probably have employees on your team currently that you would like to retain. With job seekers and employees understanding that they have a better shot at securing their dream job in today's world, what CAN you do as an employer to keep your best staff?

From March 2016 to May 2016, Careers In Nonprofits surveyed 500 job seekers in Chicago, IL and Washington, DC Metro Area, inquiring about what practices their current or previous employers could implement that would keep (or would have kept) them in their most recent position¹. **Here are the results:**

- A manager who is involved in my career growth – **35.4%**
- A raise – **26.2%**
- More responsibility in my role – **15.63%**
- A more collaborative team – **12.64%**
- Access to more resources (i.e. training, database, donors) – **9.2%**
- Free lunches and a coffee bar – **0.92%**

¹ Careers In Nonprofits (CNP) surveyed 500 candidates in Chicago and DC, who either interviewed in our offices or have registered as candidates in our online database.

Surprised by the results? We were very happy with what our candidates told us, given the number one retention practice employers can implement is cost-friendly and stress-free. Employers may feel they miss out on keeping their top talent around because they cannot offer a competitive salary. Raises, coming in at second place, are still important, but employees are looking to their managers who they feel have a huge part in their professional development and career growth.

“35.4% of employees say a manager who is involved in their career growth would keep them retained in their job.”

In third place, candidates want more responsibility in their roles. So often, we hear how our clients have limited capacity with no means to hire, but we have to ask those clients if they are taking time to speak with their current staff about projects they would like to take on and therefore identifying more ways to delegate and increase their own capacity. **Taking the time to slow down and converse with staff about their career aspirations and interests can change the course of action we take as employers and/or managers.** Are you making assumptions about any of your staff? Are you guessing that there are certain tasks they have no interest in? Even if they haven't done similar work previously, there may be no harm in letting them take a stab at a new project or ownership of implementing a new initiative. These results show that investing more time vs. investing more money in our staff can help increase retention rates and keep our staff happily engaged.

While training staff and investing in their growth may take time, it is that time we take as employers and managers to devote to our staff that helps up keep them happily engaged in their roles. For instance, do managers at your organization know how to talk to staff about their career goals? If not, suggest they read a book or an article that will tell them how. If you've been “in the biz” of fundraising for over 10 years, it may be worth it to share that insider, institutional knowledge with your team through a one- or two-hour staff training. Time is needed to plan it, but the return is much greater and your staff will be so thankful for the (cost-saving) investment you made in them. It is a win-win when staff develops a new skill set.

With all of the options we have to increase retention, let's break it down a little further – best practice by best practice:

A manager who is involved in my career growth:

More than ever, it is crucial that managers invest time in their staff. Good managers will understand the strengths and weaknesses of their employees, seeing both as opportunities to manage and develop a team that will meet the needs of their division and their organization. Training does take time, but time spent on the front end ultimately helps managers develop a productive team in the long-run.

Managers should also be fully trained and aware of how important conversations with their staff around career growth and development are. In our Career Mapping workshops, we teach professionals how to land their dream job by working through exercises and setting clear short and long-term goals that will help them get to where they want to be. While it is on the professional him/herself to create a Career Map and take these steps into their own hands, managers can play a large part in this process, too. Managers should ask their staff what their long-term career and personal goals are and work with their staff to help them create their dream job, while also meeting the needs of the organization. Does your employee want to move into your position one day? Does he/she want to buy a house? Learn how to manage an effective fundraising campaign? Good managers know these goals.

Additionally, it is on the employer to properly train their managers, ensuring that supervisors have the knowledge and “know-how” when it comes to rewarding good performance and, even more importantly, sharing critical feedback with staff on areas of improvement. Organizations should not only look to the employee that has the most tenure or experience for managerial roles. According to Gallup, only 10% of working people possess the talent to be a manager. So, how are you assessing employees that you promote to management roles? It’s important to have a quality interview process (even when promoting an internal employee) in this area because, as the results show, a manager who is involved is key in retaining top talent.

A raise:

Competitive pay and benefits are obviously still important to candidates, but it is not the most important factor. If organizations can couple other best practices listed, a combination of employee incentives (i.e. a manager invested in an employee’s career growth and a more collaborative team) can definitely help in retaining your top talent.

When it comes to addressing needs for higher pay with staff, two things are important to remember. First, manage staff’s expectations from day one. Second, have clear considerations around what will warrant a salary increase, such as exceptional performance and/or revenue generation.



When you begin to interview new hires, make sure they are aware of the salaries you typically offer for their level of experience, along with information and insight on how they can receive pay increases. It’s helpful to have a salary trajectory, but if this is not possible, let staff know they can talk about pay increases/salary needs with their managers. **Additionally, be clear with staff (both on day one and in discussions around pay increases) what warrants a raise and set clear and specific goals for them to earn one.** These goals should be attainable and benefit the organization in some way. For instance, if a Development Manager secures four \$20,000 donations in 5 months, does that warrant some sort of pay increase? Define guidelines for your organization and make sure you are communicating them to your staff.

So often employers want to avoid this conversation, but as an employer or manager, do not stray away from these conversations because if you do, your employees will stray away from you.

Also, be aware or ask what an employee is willing to accept in the event a raise is not within your operating budget. As presented in our CNP Academy Workshop on Salary Negotiations, employers can present more attractive benefits packages, increased vacation time, and more flexible schedules to get in their candidates' good graces – all without having to break the bank. Can you offer more sick or paid time off? Can you offer a gym membership or more health insurance coverage? **Ask your staff what other priorities they have and determine where you can bend and shake to keep them happily compensated.**

“15.63% of employees want more responsibility in their roles, while another 12.64% of employees want a more collaborative team.”

More responsibility in my role:

Are you often asking your staff if they feel they are utilizing their strengths in their roles? Or even more simply ask questions like, “Are there any new responsibilities you would like to take on?” or “Why does this interest you?”

These questions are crucial to ask and, as the results show, this is a question employees are begging us to ask. Our employees want to be challenged and build new skills; allowing them to

do so is a great and effective engagement strategy. Of course, the new or additional responsibilities assigned should be beneficial to both the organization and the employee, but having the conversation is where it begins.

A more collaborative team:

Whether or not you have employees in the office every day or employees who only work remotely, it's important for employees to feel like they are a part of a team. **Staff wants to know that they have reliable colleagues, who they can share ideas with and work towards a common goal.** While people have different motivations, having an overarching goal to work towards can truly bring people together.

Hiring for new team members? Think about having current staff participate in the interview process or implement a referral program. As long as it doesn't drag your hiring process out too much, it's worth it to have staff meet with potential new hires, even if it's informally for 5-10 minutes. Have a database challenge in the office? Ask around the office or gather your team together to solve the issue. Practices like this create more buy-in and collaboration. Give staff the opportunity to share ideas and show them their opinions count!



Access to more resources:

Do you ask your staff if they have the resources they need to do their job? The answer to this question could provide you with good insights on where you as an employer can improve the resources you're offering to staff. **And these resources do not even have to be the latest and greatest.**

Are you aware of where staff need and want training? Can you create that training in house, keeping costs low? Is your staff fully aware of the various functions that can be performed in your current database? If they were fully trained in the database, how much easier would that make your job? Would that also allow them to have better access to more donors – current or lapsed? Process acknowledgement letters faster? By asking this question, you may find that you do not have to pay a lot of money to provide more resources to your staff, that will ultimately make them better equipped to do their job.



It's as easy as...

1. **Invest** time and energy in training your staff and discussing their professional growth goals.
2. Be **transparent** with staff from day one about compensation and opportunities for raises. As new responsibilities and skills are acquired can a staff member anticipate a pay increase?
3. **Create** a supportive and collaborative environment by creating opportunities for cross-training and fun incentives when teams hit set goals.

Free lunches and a coffee bar:

These results prove an insightful point about “perks” in the workplace. Of all the options provided, this is the last priority for employees when it comes to remaining engaged in their current position. While perks in the work place are “nice to have,” employers often mistake them as the only means to retain staff – especially millennial employees.

Considering the responses we received from the job seekers we surveyed, **it is clearly more important for employers to invest time and money into growing their staff, offering more competitive compensation packages, a more collaborative environment, and access to more resources.** It is still nice to have “perks” around the office, such as free lunches. Perhaps you can consider offering free lunches or a coffee bar once a certain goal (or goals) is achieved. Or, given that employees are seeking more collaborative work environments, think of creative ways perks can bring people together. Baseball games? Lunch and learns? The options are endless! But this area is bottom of the totem pole when it comes to creating an effective employee engagement strategy and shouldn’t be taken as the easy way out.

Valued	benefits	Opportunity	position
	flexible schedule		full-time
Raise	stability	job	ability
unemployed		greater	team
company		Career Growth	

When it comes to retaining your top talent, what is key – especially in a market that favors job seekers and when there a plethora of job opportunities available? As our findings show, the great news is that there are a number of changes employers can make to significantly improve retention and workplace satisfaction. These changes are both simple and low-cost, offering plausible solutions for even the tightest budgets. **More than anything, employees want to know they are valued.** If you want them to be loyal and invested in their work, show that you are willing to invest in *them*. With open communication, you can easily uncover what your staff wants and how they feel about you as an employer. It can be the start (or continuation) of a strong, resilient partnership!

What’s next? We will share insights on the type of training your staff desires the most, along with other proven and effective talent management strategies.

Stay tuned, stay strong, and keep an eye out for our **quarterly whitepapers.**

