



Build your bench

In spite of management's best intentions, some companies struggle with excessive turnover. This hurts them most when it happens mid-season with the loss of key positions and is compounded by not having enough talent in reserve.

When a company is small, it is hard to envision building a pool of skilled employees. If you plan ahead, you will find the investment required to develop a bench is far less than the high cost turnover will have on your operations and morale.

For example, the lack of sufficient talent limits decision-making when it concerns marginal employees: You have fewer options. It might limit your ability to take on new work because you don't have the crew. Or, it forces you to promote employees to positions they are not ready for, and they fail. It also creates workplace stress and burn-out as managers and others are asked to step in to complete the work of a missing subordinate.

Attrition to retention

Hire who you know: Your best approach to building a strong bench is to start with the people you know. Develop and promote people who know your culture, your systems and your best practices.

› **Coach:** Do you have a culture rich in mentoring? Before you can build a pipeline of promotable employees, you need to ask yourself if you are willing to invest in their growth. Performance reviews are an important tool but do not take the place of consistent mentoring. Coaches "coach" during the game, they do not wait until the end of the season to do a performance review.

› **Communicate:** Discuss career path opportunities openly. Employees can become discouraged waiting for opportunities that do not come. Communication is ultra-critical during a recession, or during periods of restricted growth. Many longer term employees get discouraged when the positions they aspire to are filled with new employees.

› **Peer Development:** Encourage your employees to develop and mentor their own replacements; when they move up, they have a well-trained person to take over. Make it a factor in determining eligibility for promotion.

› **Performance Pipeline:** Ask each person to identify and recommend employees with potential. Develop a coaching plan that will systematically expose them to experiences and skills they need for career growth. Showing employees their personal path to success will benefit morale and engender loyalty because employees feel that the company is taking an interest in them.

There is no silver bullet to stop attrition. But a strong career development program, and a culture that encourages retention with pipeline development, will turn your 'turnover' problem into a return on your investment.

TIPS & TACTICS

Grow Your Own! The industry has a high success rate with in-house career development programs. There are a lot of talented college graduates coming out of our schools. Hire them and develop your own leaders.

If you bring on a talented graduate and place him or her in a crew leader position at a rate higher than a typical crew leader, the real cost is not the hourly rate but the difference between your crew leader rate and the new hire rate. If the recruit is challenged to improve performance by the percentage of the difference, then the cost is offset.

Poach Not! Often, in the quest for great talent, and a desire for proven performers to hit the ground running, companies seek to hire from their competitors. Before you hire from another company, remember — there are pitfalls to leapfrogging the investment in training and development to get the competitive advantage. Industry companies have low success rates when they hire from other companies. Hire for skills and abilities. Make your investment in developing long-term relationships and goodwill. Fully committed employees, developed in a high-performance culture, are those most likely to be invested in your success.