

Chapter 13

Making the Best of the Best: Strategies for Effective Retention

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ABSTRACT

Library success is a direct result of staff quality, engagement, and satisfaction. Careful selection and training of library staff and commitment to their growth are essential to staff retention, which bears directly on organizational effectiveness. Regardless of the type of library, accountability for outcomes has increased, placing greater importance on the quality of staff appointments, employee skills development, and how staff melds into a team in the work place. The cycle of employee excellence is fueled when supervisors provide challenges, opportunities, and recognition relevant to individual work styles. The authors describe the importance of effective recruitment and supervision to staff retention by discussing effective leadership characteristics, outlining the need for a supervisory commitment to ongoing employee training and motivation, and providing suggestions for building successful supervisor-employee relationships in libraries.

INTRODUCTION

As libraries continue to evolve to meet changing user expectations, a key component of the “re-visioning” process is staff hiring, training, and retention. As Terrence Mech points out, personnel are a critical resource for professional activity because the quality of work produced by an organization depends on the qualities of those hired (Mech, 1989, p. 63).

To ensure staff retention, library managers need to hire well, provide relevant orientation and training, and foster a work environment conducive to the ongoing growth and professional fulfillment of employees. Sound leadership builds an effective work culture.

This chapter will discuss how employee retention is key to the success of the organization. The authors will detail effective hiring strategies and describe how work styles as well as ethnic, cultural, and generational characteristics directly impact the

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libraries for which employees work. Suggestions for strengthening leadership, improving employee motivation, enhancing recognition, and maintaining a cycle of excellence to ensure long term success will conclude the chapter.

BACKGROUND

Staff resources are a vital library ingredient and there are many articles in the literature that discuss the importance of recruitment and retention. During the research process for this chapter, the authors found articles in both management and library literature that provide useful guidance on effective hiring practices, supervisory techniques, and retention strategies. Gregory Raschke has neatly summed up just how crucial a quality staff is to a library's relevance: "The ability to attract, recruit, and hire top candidates is the hallmark of a successful library" (Raschke, 2003, p. 53). Indeed, hiring well is consistently emphasized in the literature. "Bringing the wrong person into a position is a misstep that can cost dearly. Worse yet, the problem is completely avoidable" (Bos, 2008, p. 28). The literature emphasizes good communication with candidates during the hiring process so that both sides are interviewing each other (Bos, 2008, p. 28). Patricia Moore states that an applicant's attraction to a position is frequently based on perception and when not asking about the organization's culture outright, the applicant is "most likely scanning the environment to see if the culture" is desirable (Moore, 2008, p. 71). Moore goes on to state that during the interview, candidates quickly get a sense whether or not they will fit into the organization and if their opinions and knowledge will be respected and valued (Moore, 2008, p. 71).

The literature also demonstrates the importance of sound orientation and training once an employee is hired. "An orientation is your opportunity to engage new employees and make them productive from day one" (Davies, 2008, p. 8).

Effective orientation and training is an investment that significantly boosts an employee's sense of belonging (Boomer, 2008, p. 1). The supervisor plays an important role in the orientation process. "It is astonishing some managers remain emotionally ignorant and neglect to build relationships" with their new hires (Moore, 2008, p. 71).

The literature reflects the importance of good supervisor-employee working relationships. According to Susan Heathfield, employees "leave managers and supervisors more often than they leave companies or jobs" (Heathfield, 2008, p. 1). Leah Carlson Shepherd states that "about seventy five percent of voluntary turnover is influenced by managers" (Shepherd, 2008, p. 2). The myriad of reasons why employees seek jobs, leave jobs, and/or stay in jobs in which they are not satisfied are as unique as the employees themselves. Shepherd goes on to state that, at any given time, "seventy percent of all workers are poised to leave their jobs, either as active job seekers or passive job seekers" (Shepherd, 2008, p. 2). Thus, effective hiring and orientation is simply not enough. Retention of quality staff is a vital part of a successful organization and is significantly affected by leadership. Aparna Nancherla suggests that employees can feel energized by coaching, a process that helps supervisors to "more effectively communicate and engage employees in the organization's mission and values, and contributes to productivity" (Nancherla, 2008, p. 22).

Perhaps the largest emphasis in the literature is on suggested employee motivation and retention strategies and the complexities of successfully managing an increasingly diverse workforce. Several articles highlight work characteristics of the myriad of generations in the work place but caution that "blanket distinctions based on birth years are sometimes hard to make" (Sayers, 2007, p. 475). Other articles address ways to motivate and retain employees from different ethnic backgrounds. Peggy Johnson, for example, suggests that mentoring is critical in the retention of minorities. Studies have shown that minority

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